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MODERN

FRENCH LIFE.

EDITED

BY MRS. GORE.

Catherine Grace Frances (Moody) Gore

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

THE following sketches of the manners of the day in France, are selected from the works of eminent writers by an able linguist, for whom I have undertaken the task of revision. They may be accepted as a candid and accurate representation of the habits and spirit of "Modern French Life;" and it needs no exercise of trite morality to point out how widely and how offensively they differ from our own. The influence of conventional marriages on domestic happiness may be fairly judged by the exemplification of the following pages. The frequency of duelling, of opening the letters of others and listening at doors, introduced as incidents into the various tales, and the effrontery with which

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such actions are avowed by the perpetrators, suffice to prove the total contrast between our moral code, and that of our foreign neighbours.

For the sake of variety, two stories of Germany and Russia have been added to the collection, from the pens of two of the best Modern French novelists;—Alexandre Dumas, and Michel Masson.

C. F. Gore.

MODERN FRENCH LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

The clock of the Collège Bourbon had just struck three, and the hour was repeated by an old fashioned time-piece standing on the marble slab of a house in the Rue Joubert, the rich embellishments of which were in the style of Louis XIV. At that moment, a person possessing the crutch of Asmodeus, would have seen the silken curtains of a luxurious bed suddenly drawn open, a man of a certain age emerge with juvenile activity, ensconce his black velvet slippers, wrap himself up in an embroidered dressing gown, and, having lit the candles, commence the peregrination of his chamber,

after the fashion of a bear revolving in his cage. After a few minutes of this monotonous exercise, he threw off his dressing gown, and dressed himself with an alacrity unusual at his time of life, muttering the following monologue:

"This state of uncertainty is intolerable! I will resolve my doubts, at any price. To lie awake in my bed, or keep watch in the middle of the street, is much the same annoyance; and in the street, I shall at least have air to breathe. One thing is certain—he followed her home from the Opera. But how he made his way there as soon as ourselves, without getting up behind the carriage, is unaccountable. He is quite equal to such a feat! I shall remind Baptiste that it would be as well if he remained at his post, instead of chattering on the box with the coachman. If I had not been forced to take back that old fool who acts as her chaperon, I should have known what to do. I should have returned there; ay, returned, to be laughed at by my own servants. What signifies who

laughs! Let them only dare whisper a word! That woman will bring me to a premature old age!" said he, checking a sudden cough. "If I thought there were an understanding between them!—During the whole evening he never withdrew his eyes.—She *must* have remarked it!—The other day, at the concert, it was the same. It is time to put an end to his impertinences, which may be easily done;—but with respect to Ermance, alas! the case is different." As he uttered these last words, with a hesitating voice, the old gentleman threw up the window. The coldness of the night air struck upon his chest, and he was forced to have recourse to a dose of pectoral lozenges, to allay the fit of coughing with which he was seized. Nothing daunted by the chilling atmosphere, however, he flung on his well-furred cloak, intending to sally forth; but paused suddenly.

"My cough is nothing!" said he; "but at

this hour of the night, the Rue l'Evêque is not over safe, and to go forth unarmed would be the height of folly."

The tender-hearted old gentleman accordingly took his pistols from their case, and put them into his pocket.

"This is absurd!" said he. "Of what use were these weapons against several assailants?—Such a death would be more than sufficiently romantic! Imagine the effect of reading in the newspapers, 'Monsieur Lareynie was found assassinated under the windows of Madame Dupastel.'"

Having replaced the pistols, he took from the chimney-piece a purse, containing a dozen pieces of gold.

"Forty-five francs will be enough," said he, counting over the money he took out. "It is not every night these pickpockets of the neighbourhood meet with such good fortune. This is more prudent than taking the pistols. To be robbed is nothing; but to be killed when my

life is not my own to throw away! I must manage to get out unknown to Baptiste; if not, let him dare to say a word!"

Having thus arranged his plan, Monsieur Lareynie opened and shut the doors with the precaution of a truant school-boy, descended the staircase on tiptoes, passed the porter's lodge like a phantom, disguising his voice when calling out to have the door opened.

Once in the street, he resumed his presence of mind and traversed the suspicious quarter of the Madeleine, at that time the favourite haunt of thieves. Safe and sound, however, did he arrive at the dwelling of the woman who had so cruelly deprived him of his sleep. His attention was first attracted towards a light shining through the blinds of a room on the first floor, as from the feeble flickering of a night lamp. From the door-way under which he stationed himself, the old gentleman fixed his eyes upon this mysterious light, the only one perceptible in the street. By degrees, the

morning dawned with dim uncertain light upon the upper stories of the houses. The stars were gradually disappearing in the heavens, and the ill supplied lamps of the streets were following their example. At last, the cock crowed; on hearing which, Monsieur Lareynie experienced a degree of remorse almost comparable with that of St. Peter.

"I have calumniated her!" said he, putting up the collar of his cloak to keep off the raw morning air. "My suspicions were as groundless as they were absurd. It is day, and if the coxcomb had dared introduce himself into the house, he would not have waited until now to come forth. Decidedly I have made an ass of myself! Still, it was certainly him whom I saw on this very spot. But what does that prove? only that he is in love with her, or at least that he wants to make her believe so. But though he have the impertinence to follow her, he cannot say that she gives him encouragement. I am persuaded she would not even look at him.

We men are apt to be over hasty in our judgements. Women are on that score our superiors. Poor dear Ermance! She has been sleeping the sleep of the just, little imagining that I am passing the night under her windows. Better she should never know it. Such follies are unworthy of my age. I am half dead with cold. At the Beresina to be sure,—but *then* I was twenty-three years younger!"

Prudence now suspended his soliloquy. The workmen were proceeding to their daily occupations, and the shops opening one after the other. Paris was gradually awaking, as so powerfully described by Desaugiers. At length, the great gates of the house inhabited by Madame Dupastel revolved upon their hinges, a little crooked-legged girl appeared, wielding a broom; whereupon Monsieur Lareynie drew his cloak over his eyes, and retreated, his heart relieved of its misgivings. The hour of mystery ceases with the appearance of the porter; though a favoured lover seldom

quits the house by the street door. Convinced of the injustice of his suspicions and the innocence of the object of his affections, the old soldier of the grand army slowly withdrew.

On reaching home he got into bed for a short, time; then took a bath, breakfasted, and committed himself to the hands of his valet-de-chambre. According to the custom of old age with juvenile pretensions, Monsieur Lareynie performed the ceremonies of his toilet with closed doors; and after operations as long as they were mysterious, dismissed his servant in order to survey the result in the glass. Upon his artistically shaved face, figured two whiskers of the deepest jet, harmonising with the luxuriant curls of a wig of matchless perfection.

"This accursed night has made me ten years older!" said he, rubbing his forehead with the tip of his finger, as if to efface the wrinkles which now appeared thrice as numerous as usual.

"My hair is a trifle too dark to-day, which

hardens the expression of my countenance. I must try a shade or two lighter. I am sure brown would become me; but it is now too late to change. She is so observant! What would she think? I had formerly splendid hair! *Had!*—why must I say had!—and why oh! why must I add, that I had then a heart I could call my own!"

The old gentleman repressed a rising sigh, put on his hat, and ordered his cabriolet. It was too cold for a tilbury, and any other vehicle was too quizzical for his pretensions. Half an hour afterwards, he entered the drawing room of Madame Dupastel, presenting a nosegay which had been waiting for him at the famed shop of Madame Adde.

CHAPTER II.

The woman thus triumphant over the years and reason of poor Monsieur Lareynie, was scarcely twenty-five; but her penetrating eye, perfect self-possession, and supercilious smile, announced a degree of sagacity and coquetry calculated to drive a man in love to despair, at least a dozen times in the course of the day. Though attired as if prepared to go out, she was writing close to the fire place; but on hearing him enter the room, turned her head, to receive with a semi-affectionate smile, her antiquated admirer.

"It is you then, Colonel?" said she, affecting surprise. "I did not expect you this

morning. What a beautiful bouquet. Pray leave it in the dining-room, for I have a slight head-ache."

The Colonel submitted to this request with amiable resignation; then, came and stood with his back against the mantle piece.

"You did not expect me?" said he. "Did you suppose it possible, I could pass a day without seeing you?"

"You appear to have recovered your gallantry!" replied Madame Dupastel; "so much the better! Any thing rather than your strange conduct of last night!"

"You are too severe!" said the old beau; "a friend would have called it melancholy, — dejection,—preoccupation.

"Caprice would be a more correct definition," said she, laughing; "by what right do you encroach upon the prerogative of my sex? What was the matter with you? My aunt informs me that you did not once address her while taking her home!"

"I was thinking of *you*," said the Colonel, with fond emotion.

"Of *me*, or *him*?"—

"Do you allude to the young jackanapes, Randeuil!"

"His name then is, Randeuil?"—inquired Madame Dupastel; "not an ugly name, by the way."

"Perhaps you think him as prepossessing as his name?"—demanded the old beau, ironically.

"More so; and I am sure you share my opinion."

The Colonel bit his lips with vexation.

"Ermance," replied he, "you know how much I love you. What pleasure can you find in tormenting me thus? Be more lenient towards a weakness, of which you are the origin! True love is never exempt from jealousy."

"Excuse me! I do not authorise your love, and will not endure your jealousy. It is a failing I detest. If you wish, therefore,

to please me, correct yourself of so vile a frailty."

"I will do my best!" said the Colonel, submissively. "Are you writing to your cousin," he continued a moment afterwards.

"To my cousin, or to some other person," said she, maliciously locking the letter into her desk.

"Perhaps to that seductive Adonis?" persisted Monsieur Lareynie, with vexation.

"That would be against all rule!" said she. "It is his business to commence the correspondence."

The drawing-room door was now softly opened, and the female attendant of Madame Dupastel entered, and presented a letter to her mistress, who broke it open with perfect indifference. But after reading a word or two, the signature caught her eye. A look of astonishment and curiosity instantly pervaded her countenance.

"Is the bearer waiting?" inquired she, after reading the letter.

"He is waiting in the street," replied the attendant, with a mysterious air. "It was a porter, Madam, who brought the letter."

Ermance seemed lost in reflection.

"And he is still waiting for an answer," added the attendant.

Madame Dupastel again cast her eyes upon the letter, and abruptly added: "Let him come up. Read this!" said she, handing the letter to the Colonel; who, eagerly seizing it, perused the following lines:

"Tax not with presumption or audacity, Madam, the step I have taken in imploring you to grant me the honour of an interview upon which depends the happiness of my life. My position is so critical, that the least delay would produce consequences you would be the first to regret. Five minutes' audience,

I entreat you! My name, as that of a stranger, has no claim to indulgence. But I appeal to your heart to perform an act of generosity.

"A single word, to relieve the anxiety of your most obedient servant,

"HIPPOLYTE RANDEUIL."

"Randeuil?" exclaimed the old beau, "is it he, then, who has the impertinence to write to you?"

"No great crime after all!" said Madame Dupastel, affecting to look serious.

"And do you intend to receive him?"

"Why should I close my door against him?"

"A man with whom you are unacquainted!"

"*You* know him, and if the proceeding be irregular, can present him in form."

"Impossible, you cannot be serious! You, in general so rigidly correct, receive a man who has so long importuned you?—Your conduct all but justifies his own!"

"Do you think me a woman likely to be

injured by such a concession?" inquired Madame Dupastel, gravely.

"The angels themselves are liable to suspicion. It is my duty to prevent a proceeding, of which you will one day see the impropriety. I will receive him myself."

The old Colonel was about to leave the room, when Ermance rose, surveyed him with an imperious air,

"I accept only the services I have demanded," said she.

"A private audience," exclaimed the Colonel, in despair.

"You are mistaken. It is only an interview he solicits; its being private depends upon yourself."

Monsieur Lareynie sank into a chair. "After all, Madam," said he, "what signifies a whim more or less?"—

Before Madame Dupastel could reply, the door opened again. A good looking young man, of elegant appearance, and whose counte-

nance betrayed the greatest emotion, entered, and advanced towards the mistress of the house; but suddenly paused, on perceiving the presence of a third person, whose eyes glistening under his artificial eyebrows, announced that the fortress was not to be taken by storm. Madame Dupastel quietly resumed her seat, unwilling to increase the embarrassment of the visitor. At last, he summoned courage to address her.

"When I took the liberty, Madam," said he, with an air of deep respect, "of soliciting the honour of an interview, I hoped it would be a private one."

"This gentleman is an old friend of my family," replied Ermance gravely; "you can have nothing to communicate which I do not wish him to hear."

The Colonel, with a look of gratitude for this concession, settled himself at ease in his arm chair.

"What I have to say, Madam, must be heard by you alone," replied Randeuil with a

firm but mild voice, "allow me, therefore, to speak to you without a witness."

"After the resolution expressed by Madame Dupastel, you have no right, Sir, to persist," said the Colonel abruptly; but Hippolyte turned short round upon the old beau.

"I addressed myself to this lady, Sir," said he; and advancing nearer towards the mistress of the house, reiterated his petition.

"Madame Dupastel has already told you," the Colonel was beginning, but he had not time to conclude his observation. Ermance was one of those women to whom despotism, under the form of counsel, is insupportable.

"Excuse me, my dear Colonel," said she, rising; and proceeding towards the dining-room door, threw it open, and beckoned Randeuil to follow her; then, with a despotic glance, nailed the old beau into his easy chair.

"Now, Sir," said she, addressing Hippolyte, who had followed her, "I wait your pleasure." Randeuil would fain have closed the door. "It

is useless," said she, with a mixture of irony and gravity.

"But he will overhear me!" cried the young man, glancing towards Monsieur Lareynie; who, seated despondingly in the arm chair, seemed to suffer the martyrdom of St. Lawrence. My friend is somewhat deaf," observed Ermance with a smile; "perhaps you know how to make yourself audible in a whisper?"—

CHAPTER III.

HAVING convinced himself that the old beau could not overhear him, Hippolyte adopted the suggestion of Madame Dupastel, and addressed himself to her in a voice of most earnest expression. "The subject, Madam, upon which I am about to speak, is of so delicate a nature, that to explain myself with propriety, requires more than reflection. Unfortunately, both time and presence of mind are wanting. Every minute's delay may be productive of irreparable consequences. Excuse, therefore, the discrepancies which may occur in so hurried a narrative, and the confusion which my extreme agitation must communicate to my language."

To this exordium, expressed with a degree

of vehemence indicative of the most violent passion, Ermance replied by a smile far from discouraging. "If the minutes be precious to *you*," said she, "I also have little time to lose. Let us dispense, therefore, with further preamble. In a few brief words, explain yourself."

"Willingly, Madam. I am desperately in love."

In spite of the love of authority so developed in her nature by the blind submission of her old beau, Madame Dupastel was embarrassed by the ready and complete acquiescence of her new friend. On hearing the avowal she had herself provoked, she involuntarily averted her head, like a young soldier who tries to avoid a shot. Quickly, however, recovering her weakness, she raised her eyes and fixed upon her interlocutor one of those winning glances which exercise over confiding hearts the attractive influence of the magnet.

"Your explanation is somewhat vague," said

she; "but it is my fault. I fear I must extend my indulgence to a few more words."

Too preoccupied by his own ideas to be a nice observer, Randeuil, far from detecting her meaning, ingenuously replied—"Again, Madam, I obey you. I am desperately in love with Abeille."

"With Abeille ?"—said she, shrugging her shoulders.

"With Mademoiselle Lareynie," persisted Hippolyte; "with *his* daughter," said he, pointing in the direction of the impatient old beau. "Judge then whether it be possible to talk to you in his presence, and whether I were not right to insist on a private interview !"—

At this precise and clear explanation Madame Dupastel experienced as much disappointment as the child who beholds the premature overthrow of the house of cards he was preparing to blow down.—With unmeaning coquetry, she regretted an opportunity of displaying the

power of her beauty, as well as the strength of her virtue. It was not without secret satisfaction that, for several days past, she had remarked the various manœuvres of the elegant young man, whose assiduities were the cause of such restless nights to her sexagenarian Lothario. She was prepared for a declaration, and intended to reprove the presumption of its author; but on receiving the confession for which she had prepared a burst of irony, suddenly metamorphosed into a revelation at which the most rigid prude could take no exception, she was more vexed than if the elegant Hippolyte had given her real cause of offence. Disappointed of playing the principal personage in this affair, she resolved to reject even that of confidante. Vanity, however, got the better of her vexation, dictating an answer through which a certain degree of incredulity was perceptible,

"With Mademoiselle Lareynie?" said she. "I see nothing that ought to displease her father in the avowal of your love for a child."

"A child of twenty-two, Madam,"—retorted Randeuil.

"Twenty-two?" exclaimed Madame Dupastel, "you must be dreaming! The Colonel always speaks of her as a school-girl!"

"How can you expect, Madam, that the Colonel, with his painted eye-brows, and juvenile pretensions, should confess before you that he has a daughter who ought to be at the head of his establishment, instead of being shut up in a boarding-school to favour his affectation of juvenility. A mere child indeed! He would doubtless, replace her in her cradle, if he could."

"Pray favour me with the sequel of the romance," said Ermance, laughing. "I am prepared to hear that, independent of the interest attached to all victims of paternal despotism, your heroine is a prodigy of grace and beauty."

"You may judge for yourself; since it is for *her* I come to solicit your gracious protection."

"Explain yourself, pray," said Madame Dupastel fretfully. "Do you not see that I am

dying of impatience, while these phrases of yours tell me less than nothing."

Keeping his eye on the door to ascertain that no one was listening, Randeuil resumed in a lower voice,

"As I have already mentioned, Madam," said he, "Monsieur Lareynie, in order to get rid of his daughter, has left her at school at an age when the education of young ladies leaves nothing further to desire. In an establishment at Chaillot, where one of my sisters is also pursuing her studies, I made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Lareynie, whom to see is to love. Her beauty, her amiability, the slavery to which I saw her condemned, soon inspired me with the most sincere and ardent attachment; which, in spite of myself, unforeseen circumstances have seemed to render questionable. My conduct has been marked by the utmost propriety and respect. From the moment I discovered by the expression of Abeille's countenance, that she

both understood and forgave me, I addressed her a proposal in marriage, the success of which appeared but little doubtful. It is not vain presumption which prompts me to speak thus; for, even according to the interested calculations of the world, I was at least a suitable match. My fortune, position, and although I say it, my character, merit some consideration. A rational man would have accepted my demand, or at least reflected upon my proposition. But Monsieur Lareynie at once rejected it, and I had scarcely made known my pretentions, when he unceremoniously signified to me to withdraw them. Others have been as uncourteously treated; so that I have no grounds to resent a personal humiliation. Monsieur Lareynie finds the honors of paternity insupportable, and is still more in awe of those of a grandfather. In his estimation, therefore, a son-in-law is an enemy! His boundless admiration of you, Madam, if one may believe the report of the world, is only too

natural to cause surprise; but between this second marriage, which is the fond hope of Monsieur Lareynie, and the establishment of his daughter, there exists no absolute incompatibility. Is it because his own prospects brighten, that he is to condemn his child to perpetual celibacy?—I cannot think it, Madam, and trust you are of my opinion."

"I agree with you," exclaimed Ermance, "that to prevent the reasonable marriage of a daughter is worse than a folly—it is a crime. But proceed!"

"His refusal vexed, but did not discourage me. I felt that against injustice, any step became justifiable. From that moment, I resorted to various devices affording me a fair advantage.—Letters, stratagems, in a word, every folly from which the sincerity of my passion had preserved me, was now attempted. By degrees, Abeille shared in the spirit of revolt suggested by the selfishness of her father. I even explained to her that there

was a bold, but infallible step by which she could frustrate paternal despotism. Alas! Madam, I even persuaded her to a desperate extremity."

"You persuaded her, in short, to elope with you?" exclaimed Madame Dupastel, impatient to learn the truth.

At this involuntary outburst, Monsieur Lareynie, no longer able to contain himself, rushed into the room.

"You called me, Madam?" said he in a loud voice, advancing impetuously between them.

This ill-timed interruption roused the presence of mind of Madame Dupastel.

"You are mistaken, Colonel," replied she, calmly. "I entreat you to return a moment to the drawing-room."

"Madam!"

"I entreat you," she persisted—with a look of authority—"It appears—it appears to me that you had better comply."

"Doubtless!—but——"

"Here, or there!" said Madame Dupastel, pointing successively to the door of the drawing-room, and to the outward door.

Monsieur Lareynie raised his eyes towards the ceiling, while his arms stiffened to his sides, with his hands grasped convulsively. Then turning away like a wounded lion, he re-entered the drawing-room, of which Ermance now closed the door.

"I have guessed right," said she, advancing towards Randeuil, "have I not?"

"You have, Madam," replied Hippolyte, with a contrite air; "but for God's sake, condemn me not without a hearing."

"An elopement!—what madness!—But lose not your time in useless details."

"The catastrophe might have been avoided, had you, Madam, exerted that influence to which Monsieur Lareynie has nothing to refuse. But how can we even now engage your support? By what right, can we claim your benevolence?—Stranger, as I am, I

dared not even knock at your door. My efforts to attract your attention could only prove abortive, or be ill interpreted. I tried, however, but in vain. You were never alone, and he who was ever in your company, was the person I was compelled to avoid. Last night at the Opera, had it been possible to approach you, a few words from your lips would have prevented my rash proceeding of this morning."

"It was only this morning then, that this event took place?—Where then is Abeille?"

"For several days past, all had been prepared for our project. Abeille found means to elude the vigilance of her guardians, a carriage was in waiting, and we intended to take the road to Brussels. She wept bitterly, poor child! and at the sight of her tears, the feverish excitement, in which I had been some time living, began to subside. Romance gave way to reality; and for the first time, the consequences of my imprudence presented themselves

before me in their true light. An elopement! —her father's curse!—what preliminaries for a marriage! I know not what mysterious voice whispered, that, under such auspices, happiness must be impossible. My parents had taught *me* respect and submission. Monsieur Lareynie had a right to exact the same sentiments from his daughter. What was I then, but a vile and dastardly seducer? Convinced of my delinquency, before it became irreparable, I had but one step to take. Instead of continuing my road, I returned to Paris. But now that we are here, what is to become of us? If I take Abeille back to school, would they receive her?—If I take her elsewhere, to my home for instance, her reputation is lost. In this extremity, Madam, I bethought me of you, who bear the name of being so indulgent, so charitable. To whom better confide my future wife, than to her who will shortly possess a legal authority over her? *Your* in-

terference alone can redeem my error, and silence the calumnies she has to fear. Say, I entreat you, whether I presume too much upon your goodness; or rather tell me that from this moment you will become the guardian angel of Abeille!—My most fervent desire is that you become her mother!"

With the exception of the last hint, signifying in reality mother in law, Madame Dupastel was pleased by a confession, the imprudence of which was a tribute to her generosity of character. The part of a protectress seemed to her, at that moment, more attractive and novel than that of a coquette.

"You have judged me rightly, Sir," replied she. "I will not betray your confidence. Dispose of me, though I confess myself little experienced in such matters; and that I scarcely know how to act under such circumstances towards a school girl of twenty-two. I shall make amends for my inexperience by sincere

good will. Above all, Mademoiselle Lareynie must return to school. Where is she at this moment?"

"Close at hand, at the angle of the Place de Louis XV."

"You have left her in the street?—Have you lost your senses?"

"Nearly, Madam. After dismissing my travelling carriage, I could think of nothing better than to engage a hackney coach. I at first intended to bring Abeille here; but did not dare, without previously addressing you. I do not repent my precaution."

"To own the truth, the Colonel has a hasty temper, and the thing might have ended tragically. You said, I think, at the angle of the Place Louis XV?"

"Yes, Madam,—a brown carriage,—No. 157.

"Good!"—said Ermance; "the rest is my affair. Before an hour has elapsed, the truant

shall be safe in her cage, and we will decide what is to be done for the future."

"Do you imagine that Madame Dunois, the school-mistress, will make no difficulty?" demanded Randeuil.

Ermance shrugged her shoulders.

"I cannot promise you that they will slay the fatted calf, to celebrate the return of the prodigal; but you may be sure that the worthy woman will not shut the door she so carelessly left open this morning. The reputation of her house will ensure her silence. There is not a moment to be lost. The poor girl must be suffering martyrdom in the vehicle in which you have left her alone. I will hasten and deliver her. During my absence, remain and pay your respects to Monsieur Lareynie. Remember that your marriage depends upon him, and if you conduct yourself rationally for the future, I promise not to own that you have called him egotist, despot, unnatural father, and what

he will be still less likely to pardon,—an old beau !"

She now opened the drawing-room door, so abruptly, that Monsieur Lareynie, who was at the moment indulging in a most lackey-like curiosity, had scarcely time to rise from applying his eye to the key-hole. Without even looking at the aged dandy, who blushed like a child at being found in such an attitude, Madame Dupastel crossed the room, entered her bedchamber, put on her hat and pelisse, snatched an approving look in the glass; and seeing herself so pretty, was only the better disposed for the good action she was about to accomplish.

Hurrying down the back stairs, she left her two visitors in possession of the field.

CHAPTER IV.

Randeuil remained in the dining-room, where he waited the return of Ermance, while the Colonel, recovered from his agitation, returned to his place before the fire; his brows knit, his chin sunk into his cravat, and his arms folded over his chest, while he whistled a charge of the imperial guard, to the sound of which he had more than once passed over the ranks of the Russians and Austrians. Thus they remained for some time, eyeing each other askance, like two armies, mutually observing each other previous to an attack. At last, having eyed the clock several times, Monsieur Lareynie, worn out by impatience and ill temper, pulled the bell rope with the most

disastrous violence. On hearing the noise, the lady's maid hastened to obey the summons, astonished at the exercise of such an act of authority.

"He might as well wait till he is married," thought she, "before he takes the liberty of tearing down our bell ropes."

"Madame Dupastel is busy in her room, I suppose?" he dryly inquired.

"Madame has been out this half hour," replied she, in the same tone.

"Gone out?" exclaimed the Colonel.

"Gone out?" repeated Hippolyte.

"Gone out!" persisted the maid. "Did you not know it, gentlemen?"

"Know it indeed? No! But since your mistress is gone, you are at liberty to follow her!" cried Lareynie, in a voice that shook the room.

"What is the matter with the old fool!" —muttered the femme-de-chambre, with a compassionate glance towards Hippolyte.

"If it were yonder handsome young fellow, who were about to become my master!" said she, closing the door.

Alone with his imaginary rival, Monsieur Lareynie surveyed him from head to foot.

"Sir," said he, with affected coolness, "till now, the respect due to a woman's presence has forced me to silence. Now we are alone, and can discuss the matter freely, my conduct shall be open, and I expect on your side equal frankness. My sentiments for Madame Dupastel cannot be unknown to you. The report of our marriage is notorious in the circle in which we live. In fact, I have the most fervent hope and desire to become her husband. You know it, do you not? Answer me briefly, yes or no!"

"I have indeed heard of your intended marriage," replied Randeuil, unable to comprehend the drift of this proceeding.

"It is more than a mere project, Sir. There is a formal promise, a sacred engagement on

both sides, which confers on me legitimate rights, such as I shall enforce with regard to you, as well as others. I look upon this house as my home, Sir; and beg to know the purpose of your visit, as much as if you were in reality my guest."

"Sir," said the young man, in a most courteous tone, "another in my place might question the rights you assert; but which to others appear far from incontestable. As to me, I will not refuse to acknowledge as well as act upon your claim; and declare to you, upon my honour, that my presence here has no object at which your affection for Madame Dupastel need take exception."

"You can have no possible reason, then, for not explaining your motive," said the Colonel.

"I have no particular reason for refusing to satisfy you," replied Randeuil. "But the importance you attach to a visit most innocent in its object, makes me think the intervention of

Madame Dupastel more than necessary. From the moment her name figures in a discussion, it would be indecorous to continue it without her presence. Meanwhile, I am able to afford you considerable proof of the purity of my intentions. Some time ago, Sir, I had the honour to address you a proposition, the favourable result of which would have gratified my most sanguine wishes. Your ungracious rejection of my offer almost broke my heart, though it did not extinguish my hopes. *My* feelings are not changed, and you might cause me to fall at your feet, the happiest of men. What can I say more, Sir? Surely you will admit that my heart, engrossed by the image of your daughter, cannot entertain a hope to give you umbrage!"

With difficulty did the old beau suppress his indignation.

"This is just what I expected!" exclaimed he. "I felt sure that the name of my daughter would enter into this discussion, though she

have nothing to do with the matter. Do you suppose that I am to be deceived by such sentimental protestations?—by phrases filched from novels? Of course I am aware that you would do Mademoiselle Lareynie the honour of marrying her! My daughter is rich, beautiful, well educated (for, though I say it, nothing has been neglected in her education). I can conceive that such a marriage may appear desirable to you. But my views remain unaltered."

Monsieur Lareynie pulled up on either of his parchment cheeks the two corners of his shirt collar to conceal the corners of his mouth, dilated by a contemptuous smile.

Randeuil began again to remonstrate.

"Oh! I perfectly understand your projects, Sir," exclaimed the old beau. "You want to become my son-in-law, because the match is by no means despicable; and you wish to make yourself acceptable to Madame Dupastel—a conquest calculated to do you some honour

in the world; a double game not uncommon now a days, in which vanity and interest are harmoniously combined, without regard to the honesty or affection."

"Nay, Sir," exclaimed Randeuil, eagerly, "you have no right to accuse me of calculations so contemptible!"

"Contemptible indeed!", replied the old beau. "But you cannot suppose that I shall further your views, or lend a hand to your base designs. I give you my daughter? *My* daughter?" exclaimed the Colonel, raising his voice. "Entrust you with the welfare, happiness, existence of my child, my only child? Introduce you into my house, my family, after what happened only yesterday, after what I have witnessed, when hundreds of persons have remarked the perseverance with which, in public and in private, you have followed the lady I mean to marry. You must take me for an idiot, Sir. You must think me blind, Sir! You must fancy I have neither blood in my veins, nor

feeling in my soul! But *you insult me!*" exclaimed the Colonel in a voice as if still at the head of a regiment of cuirassiers.

"Stupid, obstinate old ass!" was Hippolyte's inward reflection; "were it not for my adoration of Abeille, what pleasure should I have in affording you real ground for jealousy."

"Let us make an end of this;" resumed Monsieur Lareynie, in a calm and serious tone, contrasting singularly with the ebullition of temper in which he had just indulged.

"Our discussion comprises two points, requiring a prompt and decisive solution. As to the first, which regards my daughter, for the second and last time I refuse you her hand. That I never intend to have the honour of being your father-in-law, I trust my words have made sufficiently clear to your comprehension."

Instead of answering, Randeuil was intensely repenting his delicacy of the morning.

"Oh, that I were still on the road to Brus-

sels!" thought he, "this surly old monster should adopt another tone."

The Colonel now drew himself up, as if to give greater importance to the words he was about to utter.

"Let us proceed to the second point," said he; "the only one which is material, for after my preceding refusal, you must allow me to look upon your pertinacity as of questionable taste. Listen to me attentively. In marrying Madame Dupastel, I am fully alive to the consequences of such an alliance. In the world, the position of a husband at my time of life, is an endless struggle. Such a destiny I contemplate, but I will triumph or die in the cause. Yes, Sir, die!" gravely repeated the enamoured old gentleman, by way of rebuke to the sneer pourtrayed on the countenance of Hippolyte. "My words may appear strange; but I swear to you, my honour shall be respected. When Madame Dupastel shall bear my name, more than one man perhaps will play

the part you have this day attempted; each of whom I shall regard as my mortal enemy, and treat as such;—that is to say, one of us must cease to live."

In spite of his disappointment, Randeuil could not refrain from admiring the energetic expression suddenly reviving the withered features of the old officer. Over all the ridicule of amorous old age, the proud veteran of the imperial army still predominated.

"The events of to-day convince me that the combat may begin even before my marriage," continued Monsieur Lareynie, with a resignation worthy of a fatalist. "You have thrown down the gauntlet, Sir. I accept the defiance, and confess myself offended by your conduct. I must have satisfaction, unless you pledge me your honour that, from this moment, you resign your pretensions."

At this unexpected provocation, Randeuil stood confounded.

"Is it a duel you propose, Sir?" said he, unable to conceal his surprise.

"Yes, Sir—a duel," replied the old man, coolly.

"And you think I would consent to fight you?"

"I have no reason for doubting your courage."

"You forget the respect due to your age."

"My age only regards myself," answered the old officer, dryly; "and since I choose to forget it, it would be a further impertinence to remind me of it."

"If you do not see yourself, Sir, I do," observed Randeuil, becoming also irritable. "I will not render myself ridiculous by fighting with a man who, though he refuse to be my father-in-law, might be my grandfather."

"You will compel me, then, to chastise you

in public," exclaimed the old Colonel, wounded to the quick.

Hippolyte, losing his patience, threw himself abruptly on the sofa.

"What are your weapons?" inquired M. Lareynie, after a brief pause.

"Crutches!" exclaimed Randeuil, greatly exasperated.

"Take care that I do not give you cause for wearing them!" retorted the irate old man, with the self-assurance of one certain of his aim. "I sprained my arm out shooting lately," (such was his version of a violent attack of rheumatism, which no power on earth could make him call by its right name); "I therefore find it difficult to use a sword, so that if you have objections to make against pistols—"

"My objections are against fighting you on any terms," interrupted Randeuil, rising impatiently. "How am I to undeceive your

unfounded suspicions and obtain peace? You talked of oaths—of solemn attestations; I am ready to comply with all you may exact."

"Swear, then, that you do not love Madame Dupastel," replied the jealous man, looking daggers at Hippolyte.

"I *do* swear that I neither love her, nor ever have, nor ever will love her. What more do you require?"

"That you will not attempt to see her again, to speak with her, or approach her."

"Since I have given you my word of honour that I do not love Madame Dupastel," replied Randeuil, eluding the question, "what need of this?"

In spite of his jealousy, the old man felt almost convinced by these reiterated and unhesitating protestations.

"A word of honour is a serious pledge," said he, "and I am not entitled to reject your's. Rather let me believe myself mis-

taken. I, therefore, withdraw the words at which you have taken umbrage. Your future conduct will give the law to mine."

"In what sense am I to understand that phrase?" eagerly inquired the young man. "May I interpret it in my favour? Am I to hope that, by dint of submission to your wishes, I may at last succeed?"

"As regards the hand of my daughter," said the Colonel, cutting him short, "obstinate as you may be in your projects, I am not less so in my decision. Do not compel me to the ungracious task of a third time refusing your proposals. After all that has passed, you have less chance than ever of becoming my son-in-law."

At that moment, the drawing-room door was thrown open, and Madame Dupastel, carefully enveloped in her pelisse, her cheeks mantling with the cold, stepped lightly into the room. Advancing towards the fire, she stood shivering between the two men, who

stepped aside to make way for her ; then, with a series of rapid and scarcely perceptible movements, surveyed her fair disordered ringlets in the glass, rolled them adroitly round her slender fingers, smiled graciously upon Monsieur Lareynie, to whose hands she confided the elegant bonnet she had just taken off, signifying meanwhile by a rapid glance to Hippolyte, that all was safe.

A moment afterwards, the old beau, in the full discharge of his functions, received the pelisse, as he had already received the bonnet, and placed it carefully on the ottoman, disposing of both with as much veneration as if they had been sacred relics ; while Ermance, taking advantage of the opportunity, whispered to Hippolyte, in stooping, to ring the bell :

" To-morrow, at two o'clock !"

Inspired by the peculiar instinct of jealousy, the old man turned quickly round, although he heard nothing. Madame Dupastel was seated on the sofa, at the angle of the fire-

place, disarranging the fire, which, the minute before, had been carefully renewed; while Hippolyte stood with his hat in hand, in the attitude of a man about to depart. In spite of the affected calmness of both, Monsieur Lareynie experienced a vague anxiety inexpressibly painful.

"You went out on foot, then, Madam?" said he, seeing an almost imperceptible splash at the bottom of her gown.

"On foot, and a famous march I have had. Your old grenadiers could not have stepped out better. I secured, at least, one advantage. I saw the bills of the Opera; they have substituted Otello for Norma, which has completely changed my plans for the evening. Bellini is the rage, I admit; but I am unshaken in my musical faith. I really must persuade my aunt to come. Will you join us?"

The conversation, thus skilfully merged in common-place, continued some minutes; at

the expiration of which, Randeuil respectfully took leave of the lady of the house, and exchanged a cold salutation with the man who disdained him as a son-in-law.

"Now we are alone, Madam, do me the favour to inform me what was the object of that young man's visit?" said Monsieur Lareynie.

"Did he not tell you then?" said Madame Dupastel, with a smile. "Of what can you have been talking for these last two hours?"

"Betwixt man and man, there are certain explanations which never take place in a lady's drawing room."

"My dear Colonel," retorted Madame Dupastel, "I am no great heroine, and if you draw your imperial sword from its scabbard, shall take the liberty to beat a retreat." Rising from her seat, and humming a military air, she proceeded towards the piano.

"You refuse me then the word that would restore me to ease of mind?" said the old man

following her as if in leading-strings, and adopting a tone of supplication. Ermance contemplating him the while with an expression of mingled kindness, irony, pity, and impatience.

"We will see about it," said she, in the caressing tone with which one soothes a child. "You shall know all, if you are a good boy. But in the first place, you have to ask my pardon for having forgotten yourself."

Madame Dupastel was now seated on the music stool before the piano. Subdued by her winning expression of countenance, and the magic of her voice, the Colonel fell at her feet, regardless of the want of elasticity in the calves of a sexagenarian.

"I forgive you," said she, trying to extricate her hand from the grasp of the old man, who was about to raise it to his lips; and in order to terminate a scene becoming so ridiculously tender, she rose without ceremony, leaving the old man fixed in his supremely critical genuflection. "It is near five o'clock," added

she, looking at the clock, "I must dress, I dine with my aunt. If you mean to be amiable, you will come and take me to the Opera."

"At seven I will be with you," said the Colonel, making a convulsive effort to get upon his legs.

"Farewell then till this evening," said Ermance, "and till then, heaven have you in its holy keeping. Adieu."

With infantine grace, she made a solemn curtsey to the old beau, worthy of the court of Louis XIV, and disappeared under the silken curtain over-hanging the door. For a moment Monsieur Lareynie stood motionless in the centre of the room, as if his feet had taken root to the carpet; then rushed towards the sofa and pressed his lips to the hem of her pelisse.

"Dear, fatally dear, and most capricious woman!" cried he, with a last glance towards the door through which she had disappeared. "You are fated to be the bane of my remaining years!"

CHAPTER V.

Next day, at two o'clock, Hippolyte Randeuil proceeded to the house of Madame Dupastel, whom he found alone, with a book in her hand and comfortably seated by the chimney corner. After a profound obeisance, he anxiously surveyed the room, in a manner that did not escape the quick observation of Ermance.

"Do not alarm yourself," said she, "he is not here."

"You have guessed right, Madam," replied Hippolyte, accepting the arm-chair graciously pointed out to him. "I cannot conceal from you, that the presence of Monsieur Lareynie makes me tremble."

"Do you suppose I allow him to come here

every day? Every Friday, for instance, which is to-day, I close my doors and receive no one; the exception in your favour is the result of peculiar circumstances. Let me now give you an account of my mission. In the first place, the lady of your thoughts is decidedly handsome; she has fine eyes, good features, a pleasant expression of countenance. No great display of physiognomy, perhaps, but upon the whole, a charming person. You are a man of taste; and I will accept such beautiful eyes as an excuse for imprudence. I will not dwell upon the alarm of Mademoiselle Lareynie, when, expecting you, she saw me arrive in your place; she must have thought me as hideous as I thought her pretty. I succeeded, however, in making her understand that her sentimental journey was at an end, and that she must speedily return to school. At Chaillot, all was settled according to my expectations. Madame Dunois will be prudent enough to hold her tongue; so that part of the business is arranged.

And now, pray, what have *you* effected? I did not dare question Monsieur Lareynie yesterday; but have you obtained no concession on his part?"

"He has obligingly relinquished the idea Madam, of cutting my throat on your account, but nothing more. As to the marriage, it is more distasteful to him than ever; and you behold a man who has undergone three several rejections at his hands."

"Cut your throat?" exclaimed Madame Dupastel. "What extraordinary ideas must he entertain about you. I trust you have done all in your power to undeceive him?"

"Assuredly, Madam. But how is one to reason with the frenzy of jealousy?"

"You made him understand, I hope, that you had never entertained the slightest pretensions to pleased me, or to interest my feelings?"

"Alas, Madam, I own I was vile enough to utter blasphemies to that effect. Last night,

in recalling the events of the day, I felt conscious that I had acted like a child!"

"How so?"

"Instead of concealing my game, I stupidly threw down the cards before Monsieur Lareynie. I read in your eyes, Madam, that you understand me!"

"I am afraid I do," said Madame Dupastel, laughing;—"but proceed."

"You are as well aware as myself, Madam," replied Hippolyte, "that men are only governed by their passions. The leading one of Monsieur Lareynie is devotion to yourself. To this exclusive sentiment, all other feelings have yielded; and the rest of the world, including his daughter, are perfectly indifferent to him; such being the case, how should I have acted? Addressed myself to this delicate chord, and direct my attack against the only vulnerable point! Fearing me as a rival, Monsieur Lareynie would, sooner or later, have given me the hand of his daughter in order to get rid of me."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it; the jealousy of Monsieur Lareynie was an offered means of salvation, and my neglect of the advantage appears perfectly unaccountable. There are days on which one's intelligence sinks beneath the instinct of the meanest animal! What has been the consequence? Monsieur Lareynie entertains no further anxiety. I have lost my cause by my own irreparable folly."

"Irreparable indeed!" exclaimed Ermance with affected gravity. Randeuil hesitated for a moment; but perceiving a slight smile upon the lip of his charming protectress, like the summer breeze that shakes the leaves of the honeysuckle, resumed in an insinuating voice:

"Irreparable, Madam, I repeat; unless you deign to repair my fault."

"What means these mysterious insinuations?" replied Ermance. "Yesterday, you sent me off to Chaillot in the service of your

love. Whither is it your pleasure I should go to-day? Do not, however, expect me to quit my fireside. I prefer resigning my functions as protectress."

"I refuse your resignation, Madam," replied Randeuil, in the same tone. "What would become of me, were you to abandon me? I entreat you, vouchsafe the continuance of your good will! What I ask, would cost you so little!"

"What is it you require?"

"Your permission to justify, henceforward, by my pretensions, the feeling with which Monsieur Lareynie thinks proper to honour me."

"Excellent!" interrupted Madame Dupastel, laughing immoderately. "You ought to write for the stage. You have a decided genius for dramatic intrigue. Yesterday, an elopement, and now a mystification. And what part, pray, do you design for me?—I trust I am not to be a walking lady?"

"You shall retain the part you play so ad-

mirably well," replied Randeuil, joining in the gaiety of Madame Dupastel.

"I am an actress, then, without knowing it? Tell me in what part?"

"That of a woman who pleases every one so wholly without effort, that it is not *her* fault if all the world be in love with her!"

Reclining against the back of the sofa, and holding in her tiny hand the point of her dimpled chin, Madame Dupastel fixed her dark eyes upon the admirer of Mademoiselle Lareynie.

"I am more inclined to laugh than scold," said she, after a moment's pause. "I must candidly confess to you my displeasure at your extravagant ideas. Marriage is too serious a thing to be trifled with."

"I am willing to be serious if you prefer it," said Randeuil, gravely.

"No, no; if you love me at all, be it in joke. Other women might, perhaps, regard the proposition as an impertinence; but in matters of love, *I* prefer the parody to the drama."

"Angel that you are!" exclaimed Hippolyte, with involuntary enthusiasm.

"Not badly done for a first attempt;" observed Ermance; "but remember, the play is not yet begun. If you prove a tolerable actor, I should think a week might suffice for our plot."

"Be generous, and give me a month," said Randeuil, eagerly.

"A month? do you want to *kill* the poor old Colonel?—My conscience will only allow me to grant what is strictly necessary. A fortnight must suffice. For fifteen days, you are free to torment the Colonel, to the utmost in your power, with the exception of an elopement, for which I do not share the predilection of his daughter. After that period, should you not succeed, you must permit me to withdraw from the scene of action."

Hippolyte could scarcely suppress his resentment at this indirect censure upon the conduct of Mademoiselle Lareynie.

"Coquette!" muttered he between his lips. "It is not from kindness she renders me this service, but merely for the sake of teazing the old Celadon, who, in the bottom of her soul, I am sure she detests. There is something in her eyes, beautiful as they are, which make me dread her as a mother-in-law. However, if she promote my marriage, I have no right to find fault!"

Madame Dupastel looked askance at the young man during his momentary silence. With the intuitiveness of quick intelligence, she partly guessed the ironical reflection of which she was the object; and this discovery produced a smile, of which the melancholy expression, possessed the eloquence of an unexpected charm.

"Be frank with me!" said she. "Just now, you called me angel; and now you seem disposed to give me another name, and that too, for an idle word that unwittingly escaped my lips. I had no intention of wounding your

feelings or disparaging your idol. While praising my goodness, I see you think me treacherous, and attribute to a caprice, which would be almost a cruelty, my conduct towards Monsieur Lareynie. Do not interrupt me," said she, with eagerness; "you are young, and I have known you but a day. By so readily assenting to your extraordinary project, I have proved that you inspire me with feelings of esteem and regard. Your proceeding yesterday, your self-government after so reprehensible a commencement, appeared to me a proof of excellent feelings. On my part, I should be sorry to have you entertain an unfavourable impression of me. If we enter the same family, I shall be your mother-in-law, but it would be painful to me to owe your respect only to that title. Having received your confession, I feel, I know not why, the strongest inclination to make you *mine*. Were you only thirty years older—"

"Since yesterday, Madam," gravely inter-

rupted Randeuil, "my head has put forth several grey hairs."

"I do not perceive them, though willing to believe it," replied Madame Dupastel, laughing. "My scruples, however, are diminished. Listen, therefore, and make what excuses for me you can. On seeing me about to give my hand to Lareynie, you probably felt surprised that, in a second marriage, I should not have desired a more suitable alliance in point of age?"

"I confess, Madam, that the happiness destined for Monsieur Lareynie seems somewhat inexplicable!"

"Suffer me to explain it. In contracting this marriage, I do not yield to the considerations which usually induce young women to marry men considerably older than themselves. My fortune is equal to that of the Colonel; and the advantage, indeed, on my side, having no daughter to establish. It is not, therefore, interest, but prudence, which influences my choice. I was far from happy with my *first*

husband. Monsieur Dupastel was very young, of about my own age. Experience taught me to regard this as a misfortune. In the world, I am pronounced a coquette; yet the natural bent of my character inclines me towards genuine and simple feelings; and though in appearance frivolous, my object is to attain happiness from a tranquil life. Monsieur Dupastel, not participating in my tastes, forced me to adopt his own. His age, for I only accuse his age, attracted him into the world, the pleasures and triumphs, of which were essential to him. What I suffered during three empty, dissipated years, my anxiety, my jealousy, nay, why should I not confess it? the tears I have often shed upon leaving a scene of gaiety, it were useless to describe. My assumed coquetry dates from that period. Women often smile the better to disguise their tears. I became a coquette from pride; but my hours of solitude were only the more dreary from temporary gaiety. On becoming a widow,

I swore to retain my freedom; but the disadvantage of being without a protector, exposed to ridiculous and irksome persecution, finally overcame my resolution. My family urged me to marry again; and, while thus beset, Monsieur Lareynie, the intimate friend of my aunt, made me an overture of marriage, which in the first instance provoked my smiles, but at length made me serious. His age, which would have caused others to hesitate, was precisely his recommendation to my favour. Experience determined me to seek in a future alliance, the certainty of peace rather than chances of happiness too often illusory. Monsieur Lareynie's time of life affords the guarantees I require. My affection will suffice him. His peculiarities of character do not alarm me. After all, it is better to be the cause of jealousy, than the victim! Indeed, with the exception of a few trifling failings, perfectly supportable, the Colonel is a man of excellent qualities. His honour and probity are beyond

all praise. He has mind, information, is courteous, amiable, and above all deeply attached to me. In that respect, I have been too little spoiled to remain indifferent to the intense affection he has conceived for me. On one point, alone—his apparent indifference for his daughter—am I disposed to blame him. But I hope to persuade him into kindlier feelings. Such, Sir, is my confession. If just now, I unintentionally offended you, you are free to pay back again, by your condemnation."

"Since you can penetrate my inward heart, Madam, you must see how I repent having, for an instant, doubted your generosity," cried Randeuil. "Do you pardon me?"

As the young man was about to rise from his chair, to reiterate the inquiry, there was a ring at the bell.

"Here is Monsieur Lareynie!" exclaimed Ermance, somewhat agitated.

"Are you sure?" inquired Hippolyte.

"*Too* sure. I know his ring full well. He

was not to have come to-day! *What* will he say at seeing you!"

"There will only be a repetition of the scene of yesterday!"

"No, no! I will not have it. Sit down. He is already in the dining-room."

The young man instantly seized her hand.

"The opportunity is only too favourable," said he; and, unmindful of her commands, he fell on his knees before her, at the moment the door flew open.

Affecting the confusion of a discovered suitor, he started up; but not so as to prevent the intruder from obtaining a full view of his movements.

CHAPTER VI.

On beholding a man at the feet of Madame Dupastel, the Colonel rushed forward. But his strength only supported him to the middle of the room. There it failed him. His knees bent, and he would have fallen, but for the table standing close at hand! Finding him totter, Ermance, urged by an instinct of humanity, rushed forward to assist him, while Randeuil brought an arm chair, into which the old beau sank pale and speechless.

"He is ill," said Ermance, somewhat alarmed. "Go into my room; on the toilet, you will find a bottle of eau de Cologne," she continued, addressing Hippolyte.

Randeuil obeyed, but at that instant the

Colonel suddenly rose, as if the movement of his imaginary rival had been sufficient to rouse him from his attack.

"Into your *room ?*"—exclaimed the old gentleman, looking wildly at Ermance. "Into your *room ?*"

Madame Dupastel arrested Randeuil by a significant look; while her hand, resting on her aged admirer, gently compelled him to remain seated. Wishing to be of use, but not knowing how, Randeuil picked up the hat and cane of the Colonel, and laid them gently on the table. But this act of politeness, far from being agreeable to him, caused his eyes to flash with anger.

"It is rather my glove you ought to pick up," said he, with his reedy voice; throwing one of his gloves in the direction of Hippolyte, which, like the bolt shot by Priam, fell far short of its destination.

Hippolyte stooping again, picked up the glove and placed it in the old man's hat, which

served to exasperate him the more. Again, he attempted to rise; but without giving him time, Ermance leant rapidly towards her confederate.

"You will kill him, if you persist," whispered she. "Never have I seen him in such a state. In the name of heaven leave us! For this time, I hope you have done enough!"

Randeuil hesitated, but, considering that by going too far he might injure his project, he bowed graciously to his protectress, and left the room.

After his departure, Madame Dupastel was as much agitated as if the scene had not been one of excellent dissembling. She closed the piano, threw the books about, as if to put them in order, arranged the fire, which had no need of arrangement; and having exhausted these little subterfuges, seated herself on the sofa.

"How do you find yourself, now, Colonel?" said she, looking affectionately upon Monsieur

Lareynie; who, during the time had maintained the most profound silence.

The old man raised his eyes, and contemplated his idol with a downcast air.

"Those who stab a man to the heart with a dagger," said he, in a feeble voice, "do not usually ask him how he finds himself."

The sadness with which these words were pronounced, produced more effect than the utmost bitterness or anger. The agitated features of Monsieur Lareynie, who during the last few minutes seemed to have grown older by several years, so convulsed was his countenance, so indistinct and hoarse his voice, inspired Ermance with a degree of compassion bordering upon repentance.

"Poor fellow!" said she. "He loves me more than I thought. Do you suffer much?" she inquired, in a tone of deep affection.

Monsieur Lareynie rose with an air of profound solemnity, like a culprit about to undergo his sentence.

"It is here that I suffer!" said he, laying his hand on his heart; "Ermance! you, whom I adore, you who possess my whole affection, and esteem, you, to deceive me thus—to betray me!—At *my* age, such a wound is death!"—

It was the first time the Colonel had alluded to his age; and the avowal impressed her with shame, for the deep injury she had inflicted on the heart of her future husband.

"To talk in this style," thought she, "he must feel the approach of death!"

Of the few real victims of their affections, those in the decline of years are certainly most in danger. Unrequited love expands upon a youthful organization like oil upon the polished marble; but in that which is more mature, it finds a thousand crevices by which the corrosive poison instils itself into the heart. Convinced of this, Ermance felt a sudden remorse, and began to repent the promise made to Randeuil. She saw only her aged admirer standing before her, his hand pressed upon his

heart, as if to staunch his wound; his cheeks so pale, his eyes so sunk, his brow so wrinkled, his bearing so enfeebled, that she feared he would sink exhausted on the carpet. To avoid such a catastrophe, she made way for him on the sofa, a favour he had never yet obtained, desiring him to remain by her, with the most copmassionate and earnest persuasions.

"My dear friend!" said she, "be reasonable. Let us argue calmly. Your jealousy has not a shadow of foundation. You are completely in the wrong."

"Wrong?" exclaimed he.

"You have taken for earnest a comedy, I might say a tragedy, in which I regret having accepted a part, seeing the deplorable effect which has resulted!" said Ermance, kindly. "The scene you witnessed, on entering, was preconcerted between Monsieur Randeuil and me. He loves your daughter, he wishes to marry her; in furtherance of which, he claims my influence. Your reiterated refusals have left

little hope to the poor young man; and in order to force you to revoke your decision, we thought of nothing better than to take advantage of your attachment for me. It was a stupid stratagem, I allow, and for the part I took in it, I sincerely beg your pardon. One should never trifle with feelings genuine as yours; and in all things, the straightest road is the shortest. Fortunately, the grievance is not irreparable. On this occasion, every body is to blame: you the first, Colonel. Between ourselves, your opposition to the marriage of your daughter is unwarrantable. The world, ever severe with respect to step-mothers, will suppose that *I* am the cause. I do not choose to pay the penalty of your errors. If you mean me to pardon the ridiculous suspicions which you presumed to entertain before my explanation, you must promise to grant the hand of your daughter to Monsieur Randeuil. He is worthy of her; he is a young man of honour and refinement. The two weddings

shall take place on the same day. You must give her a handsome fortune, for I will not suffer the interests of your daughter to be prejudiced by our marriage. Then, all will be well. Your children will bless you, and your wife approve. Come, Adolphe!—Give me your hand and say yes!"

The word "Adolphe," was a talisman which Madame Dupastel reserved for extreme occasions; and which Monsieur Lareynie found irresistible. Like all old men with youthful pretensions, he retained a childish attachment to his christian name. This time, however, the cabalistic expression failed in its effect, so completely had the foul fiend of jealousy envenomed the tender heart of the veteran.

"Madam, madam!" exclaimed he bitterly; "spare me a justification I do not demand. I never doubted the resources of your imagination; but can you suppose the best constructed plot ever imagined, capable of making me disbelieve the evidence of my eyes? Jealousy

is not so blind as is supposed. It sees exceedingly clear. Do not, therefore, try to deceive me. I am no longer a child to believe in fables."

"I am fully aware that you are no longer a child," replied Ermance, mortified by his incredulity; "but reason may fail one at any age. When I choose to give you an explanation of my own free will, it appears to me that you ought to be more than convinced."

"Yes, *I am* convinced," said Monsieur Lareynie, in a tragical tone; "but it is of your perfidy—your insincerity—your treason!"

"A truce to such gallantry," replied Ermance, roused by the energy of the implacable old beau: "your words are too kind, too gracious. But they would be much enhanced were they more calmly delivered. You are not in a council of war; this is a lady's drawing-room, and not a field of battle."

"Would to God I *were* on a field of battle!" exclaimed the old soldier.

"With me for a foe?" said Ermance. "Your victory would be easy. I own myself dead beat."

She now rose from her seat with the air of a woman who deems her visitor tiresome. Disdaining to resent this mute rebuff, Monsieur Lareynie took up his hat and cane.

"Adieu, Madam!" said he, accompanying the words by a solemn look.

"Adieu, Colonel," replied Ermance, with an arch smile. "You will return when you are in better temper. Meantime, take care of yourself. At your age, violent emotions are sometimes fatal!"

"At my age, Madam," exclaimed the superannuated beau, "one is not too old to rid oneself of a coxcomb, or revenge oneself on a coquette!"

With this bitter retort, he quitted the room.

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT day, Hippolyte Randeuil was smoking quietly by the fireside, dreaming alternately of Abeille and Madame Dupastel, when his servant entered the room announcing, "General Thorignon." The young man immediately rose on hearing this title to respect; when lo! there entered a fine imposing old man, whose stately person was further enhanced by his soldierly bearing. His blue surtout buttoned close to the chin, had ribbons of several colours at one of the button holes; and his forehead, in addition to a few grey locks, was embellished with as handsome a scar as soldier could desire.

"Sir," said the General, after accepting the chair politely offered by Hippolyte, "I am

come to you on the part of my friend, Colonel Lareynie. You, no doubt, anticipate the object of my visit?"

Throwing his cigar into the fire, Hippolyte calmly replied, "My surmises, General, are so improbable, that, to be convinced, I require the authority of your word."

"I shall explain myself in a few words," said the old soldier. "An altercation has taken place between you and the Colonel, who wishes things to take their usual course, and insists that you appoint a day and hour for the meeting."

"Although you come hither as the friend of Monsieur Lareynie, Sir," replied Hippolyte, "allow me to beg you will arbitrate between us. Judge if it be possible for me to accept this challenge?"

"And why should it be impossible?" calmly inquired the plenipo.

"For many reasons, General, which you will readily appreciate. First of all, the Colonel's age."

"The Colonel's age is my own age; indeed I am his senior," replied the General; "and had you offended me, grey though my hair may be, you should infallibly fight me. *That* reason is inadmissible; let us pass to another."

"His infirmities!" said Hippolyte. "Rheumatism in the right arm, which he chooses to call a sprain."

"And pray, who has not got the rheumatism?"—said the General. "There is but one point for consideration; the choice of arms, which we had better promptly decide. When you have appointed a second, I shall enter into arrangements with him; and I warn you, I shall propose pistols. With swords, the disadvantage of the Colonel would be such as I am sure you would not accept; while the pistol places you on even terms. I have already tried the capability of the Colonel's arm, so that you need have no apprehension on that score."

"But I respect Monsieur Lareynie," said Hippolyte, full of reminiscences of Abeille.

"What signifies that, Sir? A duel is a mark of respect. We do not fight with those whom we despise."

"General!" replied the young man driven back into his last retrenchment. "You cannot enter into my extreme repugnance to this meeting. The cause of our dispute is an act of folly. Is an arrangement impossible?"

"Sir," replied the veteran, "had there been a possibility of terminating this affair amicably, believe me, it would have been done. But my office is positive, and admits of no reconciliation. Give me a formal answer. Will you fight, or no?"

"No, then," replied Hippolyte. "I will *not!*"

"Neither I nor the Colonel could anticipate so absolute a refusal," said the General, astonished. "I must apply for further instructions. As soon as I have them, I will return."

The idea of receiving a second visit, during the day, from this messenger of war, did not

suit the projects of Randeuil, who tried to obtain a further delay.

"I require twenty-four hours' reflection," replied he; "at the expiration of which time, it is I who will have the honour of waiting upon you, for I cannot think of giving you the trouble to return."

"As you please," said the General, placing his card on the table; "here is my address. I shall expect you at two precisely."

As soon as the friend of Monsieur Lareynie departed, Randeuil dressed himself, and proceeded to Madame Dupastel's.

"Here again?" exclaimed the young widow, seeing him. "Are you going to take my room by storm, day after day?"

"Our position," said Hippolyte, "is becoming serious. If you do not interfere, I shall find myself forced to kill Monsieur Lareynie, or to let him kill me—a disagreeable alternative. I have obtained a delay of twenty-four hours."

"Such, then, is the catastrophe with which he threatened me, in going away yesterday? And so you are not inclined to fight?"

"Place yourself in my situation. It would be most disagreeable to be killed, above all by a person of that age; and if I have the misfortune to kill *him*, how present myself afterwards before Abeille?"

"The Cid before Chimène!" observed Madame Dupastel, with a smile, implying that she did not deem it a very serious matter.

"I implore you, my kind protectress, come to my aid," said he, gravely; "if not, I shall never extricate myself from this perplexing affair. Your redoubtable Colonel has just dispatched to me a formidable emissary—a General of the grand army, as ferocious as himself, and both seem thirsting for my blood."

"Good!" replied Ermance; "have you nothing more to say in your own favour?"

"Is it not enough to obtain your pity?"

"By no means enough, to excuse three visits in three days' time. I have no doubt the servants are already making their observations. Return home, remain there until you hear from me."

"Promise me you will not allow me to be killed!" said Randeuil, affecting a boyish fear.

"Not just yet—it would be a pity," replied Ermance, contemplating with satisfaction the manly and expressive physiognomy of her future son-in-law; and having thus despatched him, the young widow, without loss of time, wrote a laconic note, which was instantly forwarded to Monsieur Lareynie. An hour afterwards, the old beau, cited before a tribunal at which love-stricken hearts are enchanted to appear, entered the room with the determined air of one, who, foreseeing a mortal combat, is resolved to conquer or die.

CHAPTER VIII.

Since the preceding day, Madame Dupastel had repented having hazarded a shock to her old friend which his age might render fatal. She eyed him closely as he entered the room, and contrary to her expectations, found him but little altered. The possibility of a duel had reanimated the old warrior; who advanced with a firm and resolute air, his head erect, his shoulders squared. Observing this, her conscience became tranquillized; and as further compassion was superfluous, she returned without scruple to the exercise of her usual despotism.

"I beg pardon for having disturbed you," said she, coldly to the old gentleman, after he had seated himself. "I will not detain you

long, for I have only two words to say, I have just been informed that you have sent a challenge to Monsieur Randeuil."

"He was base enough to acquaint you of the fact?" exclaimed the Colonel.

"Rather *prudent* enough. It is necessary that young men be rational, when their seniors forget themselves. You are the master of your actions; so is Monsieur Randeuil. Fight, if you choose. I am neither a Clorinda nor a Bradamante, and certainly shall not go on the ground and throw myself between you. But as I have a right to interfere in an affair which originates with myself, I give you my honour, if this duel take place, our marriage is broken. You shall never set foot in this house again."

Monsieur Lareynie stood transfixed, as if about to receive his adversary's fire; but far less stout of heart, for the eyes of a fair idol are more fearful than the cannon's mouth.

"You hear what I say," continued Ermance,

after a pause; "I shall now dictate to you a suitable letter which will put an end to this ridiculous misunderstanding."

"A letter? to whom?" inquired the Colonel.

"To Monsieur Randeuil."

"Never—never!"

"If you do not sit down at my desk before I leave the room, I will never see you again," said Madame Dupastel, rising from her seat; and she was proceeding towards the adjoining room without even turning her head, when just as she had reached the door, the old man rushed towards her, and impetuously seized her arm.

"Ermance," said he, "one step more, and I die at your feet."

Extricating herself imperiously, Madame Dupastel pointed to the desk, but did not utter a word. At that moment, Lareynie's features seemed almost convulsed. But after shaking his head disconsolately several times,

he sat down as he was ordered. The young widow then placed before him a sheet of paper, and dipping the pen in the ink, placed it in his hand.

"Sir!" said she, beginning to dictate.

"At least explain to me the scene of yesterday?" exclaimed the Colonel;—"I saw him at your feet."

"He *was* at my feet. Write on, Sir!"

"A word Ermance, one word, I entreat you!"

"To what purpose? When I tell you the truth, you do not believe me!"

"You have told the exact truth, then. You *swear* it?—Alas! I fear I must believe your justification!"

"You should have believed me yesterday," said Madame Dupastel proudly; "it does not suit me *now* to justify myself. I will not expose myself to the repetition of having my word denied. Interpret my words as you will, it signifies little."

"I believe you, I *swear* I believe you," replied the Colonel, confounded by this firmness of language. "I even comprehend your susceptibility; but if I stoop to the vile step you require, promise me that the presuming coxcomb shall never be received here again? Oh, promise me!"

"To make such a concession, would be to acknowledge myself wrong. Besides, I do not choose to submit to conditions. You have told me a hundred times that if I married you, I should enjoy entire independence. Allow me to pre-assert that privilege, now that I am still free. It suits me to receive Monsieur Randeuil, and I warn you, that my door will be open to him."

"But he is in love with you!" exclaimed the old man, wildly.

"Puis-je empêcher les gens de me trouver aimable?
Et lorsque, pour me voir, ils me font de doux efforts
Dois-je prendre un bâton pour les mettre dehors?"

said Madame Dupastel, reciting the verses with

an expression worthy of Mademoiselle Mars; and the new Celimène twirled round the tassels of her sash till they flew into the old man's face.

"Come, come—enough of jealousy, and write!" said she. "You know very well you always end by obeying me, then wherefore not begin?"

"Do you suppose, then, I will consent to meet that man in your house again?—In the name of God, how could I help killing him?"

"You will do what all men of the world do when they find a rival: you will try to excel him in all that is amiable and interesting. A surer way to win the heart of woman, than by drawing your sword;—a fashion of the days of the empire, perhaps, but we have now grown more pacific. So remember, I bind myself to nothing. For the present, my door will be open to Monsieur Randeuil; in fact, I choose to be obeyed without conditions. Now, will you write what I am about to dictate, or not?"

"No Madam!" ejaculated Monsieur Lareynie, flinging away the pen,—"I will not."

Without uttering a word, Ermance turned towards the bed-room; and before she reached the door, the old man, for the second time, relented.

"Speak, Madam," said he, with an embittered and irritated voice! "What am I to write? I would fain trace this letter with the last drops of my blood. Perhaps on seeing me lie dead at your feet, you would repent the manner in which you have treated me."

Madame Dupastel subdued a feeling of compassion, which might have endangered her victory, and she forthwith dictated the following letter:

"Sir,

"I beg you will consider the provocation I offered you as revoked, and believe in my sincere wish to live on the best terms with you."

"Sign!"—said the young widow to the Colonel, who obeyed her, although his hand trembled with rage.

Ermance took up the letter, addressed and forwarded it to its destination, without any further interference on the part of her admirer. Among their many talents, women incontestably possess that of following up their successes. Conquered upon the subject of the duel, Monsieur Lareynie did not recover the defeat, but remained in the position of a disarmed combatant who surrenders at discretion. The conspiracy against him not only proceeded, but assuming a new and more decided character every day, Randeuil visited Madame Dupastel, and the Colonel was sure of meeting him, or forestalling him in the drawing-room. Obedient, though reluctantly, to the treaty of peace he had signed, the least digression from which would have condemned him to perpetual banishment, the only means of giving vent to the old man's grief, was the indulgence of satirical

allusions, on little vindictive inuendos; and his manner became suspicious, irritable, and sardonic. It was the season of balls; and independent of morning visits, Hippolyte found his way into all the houses frequented by Madame Dupastel. Three or four times a week, was the Colonel persecuted by seeing the object of his adoration enjoy the pleasure of the alluring waltz in the arms of his imaginary rival, while, long passed the age of dancing, he withdrew to some corner of the room; fixing upon the joyous couple the keen exterminating look with which the vulture pursues his flying prey. His savage physiognomy redoubled the interest which Ermance took in the conspiracy. Never had the world appeared to her more amusing, or gaiety more attractive. Randeuil was an accomplished waltzer, and, moreover, manifested such amiability and assiduity, was at once so intelligent and well bred, that she could not help sometimes thinking—"it is a pity all this should be mere acting!"

By dint of admiring the perfection with which

the young man played his part, Madame Dupastel became less an adept in her own. By an imperceptible progression, she felt a kind of vexation in anticipating the conclusion of this comedy. The unaccountable antipathy she had conceived from the beginning against Mademoiselle Abeille slowly developed itself, without any apparent reason. She seldom pronounced her name in the presence of Hippolyte; who, with a tact unusual in lovers, observed the same silence. Though apparently mutually losing sight of the object of their scheme, they neglected no opportunity for its accomplishment.

Every day their increasing intimacy put the passion of the old Colonel to some new test. The assiduity of Randeuil, at first affected, now became too natural. So warm was the cordiality of his reception, that any one on witnessing the mute intelligence of these two beings, apparently born for each other, might have thought it the result of true and heart-felt attachment.

One evening, the three personages of this

drama were assembled at the house of Madame Dupastel's aunt, to whom Hippolyte had found means of getting presented. Monsieur Lareynie could not avoid sitting down to piquet with the lady, while Ermance placed herself at the piano, much amused with the lugubrious countenance of her aged swain. Randeuil, after affecting for a moment to look at the game, seated himself by her side. They conversed some time without paying much attention to the music, while the Colonel was throwing out his aces and quatorzes, in order to abridge the game, and fidgeting about in his arm-chair so as to catch, in the glass, the figures of the couple to whom he was turning his back.

"Are you aware that the time I granted you expired more than a week ago?" said Madame Dupastel, running her fingers up and down the keys.

"Impossible!" replied Hippolyte, eyeing the ivory hand which was performing these rapid evolutions.

"Twenty-four days! I have counted them correctly."

"They appeared, then, very long to you?" inquired Hippolyte.

"Is it only the days that seem long to us we are tempted to count?" she retorted; and, as if to connect her words, she struck the chords of the instrument with increased vigour. "Might not one fancy he was in the plot! Sometimes I think he would kill you with pleasure, and perhaps me afterwards. Still he does not give in, and it is now time that he decided. Were he really attached to me, it would be already done. But these old soldiers are so obstinate."

"You will see that he prefers this torture to submission. He belonged to the old guard; and the guard dies but never yields."

"Are we not to have some music," inquired the old aunt; "it would please the Colonel more than cards. I never saw him so out of spirits as to-night, and I have not the heart to win any more of his money."

Ermance opened the opera of Guillaume Tell, and began the duet of the second act. Randeuil sang the part of Arnold, and they both executed their parts with a taste and precision which excited the admiration of the old lady. The Colonel, however, refrained from adding his approval. During the whole duet, he paced up and down the room, regardless of disturbing the singing. After the last bar, he paused before the piano, and addressed himself in the tone of one who has made up his mind to an extreme measure.

"Since you are so fond of music," said he, "I ask permission to present you a young beginner."

"Who is that?" inquired Madame Dupastel.

"My daughter, who returns home to-morrow," replied the old man, continuing his walk.

"The old guard is beginning to give way," said Hippolyte, in a low voice, to his fair protectress.

Ermance fixed her eyes upon the young man, who was stooping to utter this whisper; and, vainly trying to smile, she left the piano, sat down near her aunt, and during the remainder of the evening, replied only in monosyllables to the questions addressed to her.

The anticipations of Randeuil were now fully realized. Monsieur Lareynie perceived that some manœuvring was positively necessary to regain the ground which, from day to day, he had lost. He suspected that the conduct of the parties was the result of some vindictive scheme. But from the sudden alteration in Madame Dupastel's manner, he saw that she attached a more than ordinary value to the attentions of which she was the object. However favourable the opinion an old man of a certain age entertains of himself, there are certain moments in which the truth of his position becomes apparent; at his toilet, for instance. The Colonel was forced to confess that, in a contest with a young man of twenty-five, the

issue would, in all probability, be to the advantage of the latter; and the fear of finding in Hippolyte a successful rival, got the better of his repugnance to accept him as a son-in-law. In consequence of this dilemma, Abeille was brought home to assume her place upon the field of action.

"She will be the Desaix division at Marengo," said the old soldier. "If the attack do not succeed, I shall have to make an end of this coxcomb, and shoot myself into the bargain."

CHAPTER IX.

Some days afterwards, Randeuil, on entering the drawing-room of Madame Dupastel, found Monsieur Lareynie and his daughter. The interview was, on the whole, constrained and embarrassed; though the jealous father, affecting not to be aware of his presence, left them at liberty to do as they liked, the better to further his personal projects. A few stolen glances, and mysterious allusions, were all that the young man could adventure; while Abeille sat fixed upon her chair, her eyes cast down, beautiful as an angel, but awkward as a school-girl. Her agitation upon seeing her admirer, partook more of vexation than

tenderness. A woman will forgive having been carried off, but not having been brought back again. Mademoiselle Lareynie, arrived at her twenty-second year, had managed to read a stray novel or two; and in the course of these perusals, had never found the heroine in the midst of the adventure, and at the moment most interesting to two persecuted lovers, conveyed back to school. Far from experiencing any gratitude towards Hippolyte, she resented an act of prudence which by no means emanated from her. On reflection, she suspected that such extreme caution originated in diminished attachment, and could not disguise her inward mortification in being the object of so prosaic and unenthusiastic a passion, instead of finding an admirer worthy a descendant of Werter or Malek-Adhel. The lovely Abeille, oppressed at heart by a system of never-ceasing and persecuting seclusion, had at length begun to attribute to Randeuil, the sufferings of which formerly she was wont to accuse her father.

"Had he chosen, I should now be free," said she to herself; and she loved him all the less for the reflection. Interpreting the impressions of Abeille according to those which he himself experienced, Hippolyte attributed to the presence of the Colonel and Madame Dupastel the indifference with which he was received; this indifference seemed to him out of place, and made him conceive a resentful feeling. Disposed to criticise, the young man regarded with a more scrutinizing than admiring eye, the appearance of the young lady, who, till lately, he had only seen in the simple attire of the school uniform. The examination was little flattering to Mademoiselle Lareynie, who, emancipated from the thraldom of school discipline and simplicity, fell into a style of costume somewhat exaggerated.

"Who the deuce could have invented such a hat as that? Yellow, and with a bird of paradise!" thought Randeuil, minutely examining the different details of her dress. "A bird of Paradise upon a yellow hat! And then, the

red shawl upon the flowered gown! A perfect masquerade! May I die if I do not throw all that into the fire the day after the wedding. The most amusing is, that she thinks herself divinely dressed; and gives herself airs upon the strength of her finery!"

Involuntarily, Hippolyte turned towards Madame Dupastel, who, as usual when at home, was simply yet elegantly attired.

"*There* is a woman who knows how to dress," thought he. "What perfect harmony of taste! How the dark colour of her wrapper sets off the admirable whiteness of her skin. Coquette! she knows it, and no doubt it is to exhibit her graceful neck that she does not wear a collar this morning. How perfect too the effect of the black velvet bows in her fair hair; and look at the slippers on her fairy feet! She sees me admiring them, and hides them under her gown. She guesses everything!—I like that. Abeille would do well to imitate her; instead of shocking us

with those nauseous green boots, with which she seems enchanted. Ermance has a foot as diminutive as it is well shaped. Her hand, too, is so delicate and elegant, that, by comparison, all others appear coarse and vulgar. Assuredly Abeille is handsome, perhaps handsomer than Madame Dupastel. Her features are more regular, her eyes finer, her style more classical. But still, I know not—seeing one by the side of the other, it is impossible not to find Abeille's face rather monotonous; handsome, but ever the same! Ermance has such a play of features; never the same expression two days running. To-day, for instance, how thoughtful, how melancholy, though habitually so gay. She has been some days thus. Why, I wonder? Is she unwell, or is it the prospect of her marriage?—That old Cassander of hers is enough to give any woman the nightmare! Poor angel! I don't wonder she looks unhappy."

At that moment, his eyes encountered those

of Ermance; and after exchanging a longing look, she relapsed into her thoughtfulness; while Randeuil, persisting in his comparisons, discovered every minute some fresh subject of criticism in the manners or conversation of his former idol.

For some time, Hippolyte was sure to meet Colonel Lareynie and his daughter, at every visit he made to Madame Dupastel; a circumstance too frequent to be purely accidental; but failing in the result anticipated by Monsieur Lareynie. Mortification at her admirer's neglect, imparted a cold and haughty expression to Abeille's countenance, as well as a kind of premeditated reserve to her manner; nor did Hippolyte seem disposed to revive the fervour of which he was once the object. Far from trying to conciliate her, he remained reserved, comparing, analysing, and lost in a state of hesitation, which became more and more perplexing. Ermance seldom laughed, rarely even smiled, and vainly tried to dissi-

mulate her increasing melancholy. Polite to Mademoiselle Lareynie, she pointedly avoided addressing Randeuil; and with an ungenerous tyranny, inflicted upon her aged admirer the tedium of her own despondency. By degrees, this state of depression assumed a more serious character. Society wearied her, and one morning, her door was denied to all; not excepting her aged admirer, and youthful protégé.

After four days, during which he did not see Madame Dupastel, Randeuil fell into a kind of apathy, the usual result of inertness. A letter to the young widow, evincing the warmest interest, produced an answer as reserved as it was cold.—In order to occupy his evenings, he frequented the theatres; and on one occasion, met General Thorignon, whose visit he had returned some days before. After some common place observations, the old soldier took Hippolyte familiarly by the arm.

"I owe you some reparation," said he, "for I know all; and your reluctance to fight with my old friend the Colonel, has nothing to surprise me. A man should think twice, before he goes out to kill his father-in-law."

"Monsieur Lareynie is not my father-in-law," replied Hippolyte.

"Not yet, I know. But are you not impatient that he should be so?" replied the old General, smiling.

"It is impossible!" coldly replied Hippolyte.

"Nothing is impossible," earnestly observed the old soldier. "Listen to me. I am a poor diplomatist, but let us meet the question at once. I have made inquiries concerning you; and find that in spite of your too pacific intentions, you made an example of one of the most awful lions of the Opera. You are a right good fellow, and would make a fitting protector for the daughter of an old soldier, like Lareynie. The Colonel is not so terrible as he looks; and I can

always make him listen to reason. Have you confidence in me? Will you entrust me with your interests? The other day, I brought you a hostile message. Here I am, ready to undertake one of another nature, if you will only trust me."

"I thank you, General. But since you are intimate with the Colonel, you must be aware that he positively refused me the hand of his daughter."

"Nonsense! Lareynie is like the pretty women, who always begin by saying no. *I* will engage to make him say yes. Odds bombs, and bullets! I have known him these forty years. Did we not, at the passage of the Beresina, eat cartouche boxes fried in gunpowder, and together think ourselves too happy? After such a dinner, men remain not only friends for life, but brothers. Were I to say, give your daughter to Randeuil, he must do it!"

"I would not have Monsieur Lareynie do violence to his feelings by accepting me for his

son-in-law;" said Randeuil, whose matrimonial ardour seemed to diminish in proportion as the obstacles disappeared.

"But who talks of violence?" replied General Thorignon. "May not the circumstances, as well as his sentiments have changed? How do you know that the Colonel is not disposed to renew the negociation? You must well imagine that would be unbecoming the paternal dignity to make the first advance. But if I make this offer, it is that I am sure of your being accepted."

"Monsieur Lareynie, then, has commissioned you General, to ascertain my actual feelings as to marriage?" inquired Randeuil, maintaining the most diplomatic reserve.

"I did not say that!" replied the old General, laughing; "do not fall into new blunders. My intervention is of my own free will. Is it your pleasure to accept it?"

"Grant me a day's reflection," said Hippolyte, with an air of gravity.

"*Again?*" exclaimed the General. "You

are a man of most procrastinating habits. In *my* youth, odds bombs, and batteries! duels, love, marriage, every thing was decided in the twinkling of an eye.—After all, your system may be the best.—Well! I grant you your twenty-four hours!"

The music announced the rising of the curtain for the second act of the Sylphide, which put an end to the conversation; and the two gentlemen separated, promising to meet again at the General's, at the expiration of the delay conceded.

CHAPTER X.

Next day, about one o'clock, Randeuil presented himself at Madame Dupastel's. He was denied admittance; but the femme-de-chambre, to whom he was more acceptable than the old Celadon, and who had interpreted the melancholy of her mistress, with the sagacity peculiar to her calling, took him under her protection.

At sight of her admirer, Ermance, faintly blushing, tried to rise but sank down again, utterly depressed.

"I had given orders to them not to let any body in," said she; "the sight of a poor invalid is so insupportable, that I have condemned myself to absolute solitude. You

do not find the person here whom you came to seek."

"Whom?" inquired Randeuil, surveying the fine form of the sufferer, half reclining on the sofa.

"Mademoiselle Lareynie came here a short time ago. I regret that I did not admit her; but how could I anticipate your visit?"

"Had I wished to see Mademoiselle Lareynie," said Hippolyte, "I should have gone to her father's, and not come here."

"The Colonel receives you then? You go there?" said the young widow, raising herself.

"I could if I thought proper."

"I see you did not choose to avail yourself of the privilege, before you had made it known to me. Good! In rendering you a trifling service, my good intentions have not been thrown away. I have not seen Monsieur Lareynie for some days—I suffer so much, I can see no one. So then, all is settled.—When is to be the marriage?"

"Was it not decided that the two weddings ıould take place together?" inquired Ran-ɐuil, whose eyes seem fixed upon the graceful ʒure of his beautiful and desponding pro-ctress.

"There will be but one," said she abruptly.

"Mine or your own?"

"Yours—yours—oh! do not fear."

"But yours!" said Hippolyte hesitating. Forgive my anxiety. Is not Monsieur Larey-e to marry you shortly!"

"Never!" exclaimed Ermance.

"Never! I entreat you repeat that word ain."

"What means this?" cried she earnestly garding him.

"It means that I am happy; that every ing seems enchantment! I breathe freely.) then, you will not marry him?—You said *ver!* a sacred word. Youth, beauty, grace, ll escape the profanation of that hor-ɔle old man!—You perceive at last, that

such an alliance would be sacrilege! Of what avail your spring tide of life, enslaved by his decrepitude? One strews roses over a tomb, one does not enclose them within. The first condition of happiness, is harmony. You have endured so much that your sorrows steel your heart against the professions of youth. But because a first ordeal was fraught with bitterness, are your hopes to be for ever withered? Because one man was unable to appreciate the treasure he possessed, do you deem the sanctity of devotion impossible? Is it because you trample the buds and flowers of life under foot, you boast of your experience and wisdom? Ermance! Love has a real and true existence! But I forgot myself in wishing to convince you of that which you no longer doubt! You are free! The blessings of liberty, youth, and love may still be ours."

Madame Dupastel supported herself against the back of the sofa, while Randeuil unbosomed his feelings. Her hands were clasped together,

her eyes partly closed. On hearing her name pronounced by a voice tremulous with adoration, she experienced emotions long unfelt.

"You did not answer me," said she, "when I asked you when you were to marry?"

"Because you know it better than I do!" replied Randeuil, to whom the first glance of Ermance had betrayed her. "How should I know it?—It depends wholly upon *you*."

"I thought it depended upon Mademoiselle Abeille," observed the young widow. "It appears to me that you have rather forgotten the heroine of your romance."

"My romance is ended, and my life now begins," replied Hippolyte, seizing her lovely hand, which this time was but reluctantly withheld. "I confess myself to have been out of my senses. But forgive me, I did not know you then, and mistook for love the freaks of an irritable imagination thwarted by impediments. In that young girl, it was the victim of paternal despotism with whom I sympathised.

Behind bars and blinds, any woman appears an angel. Upon a closer view, the wings of the angel too often vanish, and in place of the celestial being I thought to have discovered in Abeille, I find a raw, graceless, insignificant school-girl! Under any circumstances, the veil would have fallen after half-a-dozen interviews. But by your side, illusion was, from the first, impossible. Seeing you both together, I sought in vain a passion which was but a mere shadow; but in its place, found another, of whose existence I was unaware—a passion genuine, deep, and fervent!"

Hippolyte fell upon his knees, and his arms quickly surrounded the waist of the irresistible widow. She made an effort indeed to escape, but too feeble to avail.

"How am I to know that this is not another comedy?" said she, concealing her emotion with a smile.

"No no!—all, henceforward, is reality!"

"And what are we to do now?"

"Love each other, and be married as soon as possible!" exclaimed Hippolyte with enthusiasm.

"You take things coolly indeed! But even were I to consent, you may forget the other two!"

"I think only of you. Besides, what could they say? We were two children—you to think of marrying an old man;—I to run after a half formed school girl! Now we are more reasonable. Monsieur Lareynie must think of his last will and testament. His daughter will forget me, if she have not already done so; and we shall be perfectly happy." A noise in the adjoining room interrupted the interview, and Hippolyte quickly started up, for the comedy was over.

Monsieur Lareynie now entered the room conducting his daughter, with her inevitable bird of paradise!

"You missed your angel's wings," whispered Ermance; "do you not see them on her hat?"

Exchanging smiles, they began the reverse

of the scene they had been playing. Indifferent, they had affected love;—in love, they affected indifference. But this time, they were not equal to their parts. The heart is but a clumsy actor. Their looks and words, though most involuntarily, would have revealed a secret understanding to the least observant of observers. Convinced of this connivance, which every moment betrayed itself by trifles, insignificant in appearance only too significant in his estimation, Monsieur Lareynie writhed under the most painful tortures of jealousy. His apprehensions were beyond doubt, when he learnt from General Thorignon that Randeuil positively renounced the honour of the hand of Abeille.

"What does he expect, then?" exclaimed he, in a paroxysm of anger. "Does he hope to marry Ermance?"

Excruciated by the thought, the old beau proceeded to the house of Madame Dupastel.

"Long, much too long, have you deferred

the climax of my happiness," said he. "This delay kills me, and I will endure it no longer. I will not leave this house till you have fixed our wedding day."

"I have already told you, that you must first grant the hand of your daughter to Monsieur Randeuil," replied the young widow, dreading to communicate the truth to the old beau.

"I have granted it, and it is he, now, who does not choose to accept; and I know the reason of his refusal. He loves you, Madam, nay, perhaps pretends to your hand."

"Will you kill me if I grant it?"—asked Ermance, affecting to laugh, though in reality afraid of the violence to which Monsieur Lareynie had just given way.

"You know I could not!" replied he; "it is he whom I would kill! If he refuse to fight me now, on the day of the wedding and at the foot of the altar, he should die."

"What melo-drama did you see last night, my dear Colonel? I never saw you in so

sanguinary a humour!" said Ermance. "The passage of the Beresina was a mere pastoral compared with what you threaten."

In spite of the assumed indifference with which she listened to the vindictive threat of the old man, she was seriously alarmed; and would fain have imparted her terrors to her admirer.

"What folly!" said he. "The old fellow is in his second childhood."

"You did not see the expression of his eyes! I tried to laugh, though I was horribly frightened."

"Nonsense—nonsense!"

"I tell you, he is capable of any thing," replied Ermance, disposed, like all women, to exaggerate the intenseness of the passion of which she is the object. "I will not allow you to meet each other here."

"That is to say, you will shut your door against him; just what I was about to ask you! I will not allow the old fop to come and pester

you to death with his antiquated rodomontades."

"Shut my door!—can I?"—said she, as if unwilling to assent.

"What hinders you?"

"A thousand reasons. He has been so long in a state of agitation, that such a proceeding would overwhelm him. He is more than sixty; at that age, such emotions have the most fatal consequences."

"I am astonished that he is still alive. Had I only a good chest complaint at my disposal!"

"Hippolyte, I never should forgive myself if any thing happened on my account; I should be miserable. Poor old man!"

"Rather say intolerable old bore."

"Does it astonish you that he should love me?" said Madame Dupastel.

"No, but I must be henceforward the only one to love you to distraction."

Heaven seemed to propitiate the prayer of

Randeuil. The violent agitation to which the Colonel had been for some time subjected, had an evil influence on his constitution, already impaired by the fatigues of war. After leaving a ball, in which he had seen his rival dance three successive country dances with Madame Dupastel, a trembling seized him—fever ensued; and in spite of the skill of the physicians, the man of a certain age was compelled to take to his bed. When the attack had lost its serious symptoms, he was still subjected to a strict regimen, and absolute seclusion. Hippolyte was thus left master of the field, and hastened to take advantage of his position. The attachment of Madame Dupastel was too deep—too sincere—not to obliterate the remembrance of the old man, whom she now saw no more, and for whom she had never entertained any other interest than that of compassion.

On learning that Monsieur Lareynie was in a state of convalescence, Ermance consented to

ix the day of the irmarriage—a step hourly urged
›y her admirer; but with much good feeling,
he wished the ceremony to take place as pri-
ately as possible, lest the news, reaching
he ears of the Colonel, should oppose a fresh
›bstacle to his recovery. The lovers accom-
›lished the most solemn action of their lives,
›bserving as much mystery and precaution
.s if they had meditated some act of guilt.
mmediately after the nuptial benediction,
hey quitted Paris, in order that they might
.void the scene which must infallibly take
›lace upon meeting Monsieur Lareynie.

One bright morning in spring, Ermance and
Hippolyte took the road to Belgium in a
omfortable travelling carriage—a hideous road
vhich, to them, seemed strewed with roses.
A short time before reaching the first stage,
he bridegroom pointed out to his bride a
lecayed elm which stood on the road side.

"I love that tree, and wish we had it in our
;arden!" said he.

"It has surely no great beauty to recommend it?" replied Ermance.

"None whatever; but it recalls the first day of my happiness. It was here I turned back, when carrying off Mademoiselle Lareynie."

"How came you to select this ugly road?" asked the bride; "it is detestable! On this occasion, I could willingly turn back."

"It is too late!" said Randeuil, laughing, and with one arm rapturously encircling the lovely waist of Ermance, he indulged in all the protestations of the happiest of bridegrooms.

CHAPTER XI.

About the middle of August, the newly married couple, after visiting Belgium and Holland, returned by the Rhine, so that they might return to France by the duchy of Baden, where they remained some days, the baths having attracted a gay throng of strangers.

One of the first familiar faces met by Randeuil, was that of General Thorignon. He quitted his wife's arm for a moment, (who also recognised a Parisian acquaintance), and went up to the old soldier, whose reception, though cordial, seemed to betray a certain embarrassment.

"Who is the lady you are with?" inquired the General, after some insignificant comments.

"My wife," replied Randeuil; "did you not know I was married?"

"But too well," answered the old man shaking his head. "*That* then is Madame Dupastel!—pardon me, she who *was* Madame Dupastel! She is charming, most charming,—and I am far from astonished at the ravings of my poor friend Lareynie!"

"What has become of him?" inquired Hippolyte, really interested.

"Do not ask me!" replied Thorignon. "I had rather he had remained in the snow with his brave companions in Russia! Yes, Madame Dupastel, Randeuil I should say, can boast of having been more fatal to the poor Colonel than the frozen north, or the lances of the Cossacks! Such is the heart of man! a delicate foot, or expressive eye, is sufficient to annihilate the most undaunted of us! I who speak to you, had well nigh lost my wits for the sake of little Armandine of the Opera!—Luckily, I possess more moral courage than my

old friend Lareynie, and am come to forget my sorrows in the gaiety of Baden. Poor Lareynie! shocking business! But I know there is no reproach to make you or Madame Randeuil. You were both young—both in love—marriage was inevitable! Others would have done the same in your place. I for one, must confess you were much in the right to prefer this marriage, to that which I undertook to negociate. Had you married the other, where would you be *now!*"—

"What do you mean?" inquired Randeuil.

"Have you not heard of the adventure of Mademoiselle Lareynie?"

"No; we are just returned from Holland, and for these three months past, have heard nothing."

"Know then, my dear Sir, that Mademoiselle Abeille—your former flame—who, thanks to the negligence of her father, received a most detestable education and got her head well crammed with romances, decamped one fine

morning—with her music master, and is now in London. What say you to that? You have had an escape I think."

"And this time she was not brought back again! My wife was right! Elopement was a vocation with that poor little girl."

"You may imagine the consequence of such a history, disclosed to the Colonel, when scarcely convalescent, after having suddenly learnt your marriage! I thought for several days, he would have gone completely mad."

"But where is he? what is he doing now?" inquired Hippolyte, more and more interested in the fate of the wretched old man.

"He is here!" said the General; "did you not know it?"

"Here?"—exclaimed Randeuil, in surprise.

Ermance joining her husband, put an end to this conversation; and the latter, in presenting the old General to his wife, enjoined the strictest silence. The evening was advanced; and the happy couple left the old

soldier, and entered the public rooms crowded by the gay visitors of the baths.

Having paraded the ball room, they entered an adjoining apartment—in the centre of which was a green table, upon which figured a series of figures as incomprehensible at first sight as the hieroglyphics of an Egyptian obelisk, on either side of which were seated certain individuals of a sombre and inflexible countenance, holding wooden rakes in their hands, and handling the piles of gold and silver before them, with as much indifference as a child its playthings. Two ranks of either sex, one seated, the other standing, hemmed in the table, upon which were performed, under the sanction of the Grand Duke of Baden, the mysteries of Rouge et Noir.

Having watched with painful excitement the distorted physiognomy of several distinguished looking men and elegant women, who one and all bore upon their forehead the mark of the demon claw of play, Ermance and Hippolyte were

about to quit the room; when the latter suddenly halted, struck by the appearance of an individual seated close to one of the ministers of perdition. He was a man of a certain age, of wild and sinister expression of countenance. In his face, pale and emaciated, one detected the trace of some ungovernable passion, which had left marks of premature decrepitude. His eyes were sunk into their orbits, while their arches were denuded of eyebrows. From beneath an ill fitting wig, protruded importunate grey hairs; while his whole attire evinced complete indifference as to personal appearance. Leaning over the pile of gold and notes which lay before him, he seemed absorbed by the progress of the deal, every point of which he carefully marked upon a card.

Hippolyte had no difficulty in discovering in this stranger, whose exterior inspired such compassion, his unfortunate rival; and he would fain have taken away Ermance, so as to spare her this mortifying scene. But the end

of the deal caused a general movement among the lookers on.

While the croupier was preparing the cards for the succeeding deal, several of the players rose; when suddenly, Monsieur Lareynie found himself standing before the happy pair, so that Randeuil could not well avoid him.

At sight of Ermance and her husband, the old man appeared convulsed; his sullen looks brightened and his extinguished eyes flashed, while a hectic colour rushed into his death-like cheeks. In spite of the alteration which might have made him difficult to recognise, Madame Randeuil instantly sent forth a shriek of fear and pity.

Monsieur Lareynie hesitated, as if suffering from terrible internal excitement; at last, inclining before his once adored idol, "Do I frighten you, Madam?" said he in a broken voice, with a smile as ghastly as that of a dead body subjected to the operations of galvanism.

Ermance muttered some incoherent words.

Her old admirer made no allusion to his former attachment; but his dreadful metamorphosis spoke sufficiently. Between the sexagenarian dandy, adonized, painted, perfumed, nursing his decayed remains with the solicitude of a coquette, and the ill-clad gamester, there was an immeasurable abyss—an abyss of her sole creation! A knock of the reckless croupier on the table, recalled the victims to their mad vocation; and Monsieur Lareynie clasped his forehead with his hands, and bade farewell to Ermance.

"You are playing then?" said she, with a tone of friendly reproach.

"I have just lost fifteen thousand francs," replied he coldly.

"But you will ruin yourself!" she persisted with much emotion.

Monsieur Lareynie looked at her sternly. "Not quite, but I am getting on. How else was I likely to drive the past from my recollection?"

As he said this, he sat down, and threw down a bank note, drawn in by the merciless instrument of ruin, just as the wind carries off the fallen leaf.

"Let us go," said Ermance to her husband; "the air of the place stifles me."

They left the splendid den, and went out to breathe the pure, uncontaminated air. The night was calm, the orange trees in flower, and the heavens dazzling with stars.

"We will go away to-morrow—shall we not?" said the young wife in a tone of depression.

"You seem unhappy?" said Randeuil, affectionately pressing her arm.

"Alas! we have much to reproach ourselves with!"

"Something perhaps; but his own folly is the origin of all. In a man of his age, his passion for you was almost as unbecoming as his present infatuation for play. When he should have thought only of being a father, he chose to play the lover; and see what have been the

result for his neglected daughter !—Remember all his youthful airs, his idle vanities !—He was ever intent upon some folly unbecoming his years !"

"And dearly has he paid for them," replied Ermance gravely.

"Thank heaven that you, at least, have escaped participation in the consequence of his absurdities, dear Ermance. Human happiness cannot be insured at a ratio of so much per year, like human life. Trust me, you have a better chance with a man of your own years, habits, and pursuits, than with a frivolous and vain-minded MAN OF A CERTAIN AGE."

AN APT SCHOLAR.

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CHAPTER I.

Towards the end of the carnival of 1835, a long string of carriages, graced with armorial escutcheons, was besieging the entrance of one of the sumptuous mansions of the Faubourg St. Germain, the gates of which were open, while the windows remained closed; though common sense suggested the reverse, for the internal air diminishing in proportion as the guests increased, suffocation seemed to threaten the brilliant throng.—Nevertheless, these sufferers of fashion, whether men or women, especially the latter, supported with admirable fortitude an atmosphere which

would have been death to a negro.—Of the old stagers, three or four took up their positions, out of the vortex, in a group composed of four or five men from twenty-five to forty years of age, whose social position was defined by certain symptoms in which the close observer is seldom mistaken. Indifferent to the splendour of the passing *scene*, they resigned themselves listlessly to the entertainments of the night; in contradistinction to the newly launched bumpkins from the provinces, whose curiosity is rarely satisfied till they have ransacked every corner of the house. Regardless of the spectators, they conversed among themselves, interfered with no one, and listened to the announcement of the most brilliant names in France with complete indifference; not so much as turning their heads for dukes or ambassadors. When some woman of unquestionable fashion, however, made her entrée, they deigned to bestow a glance upon her, quickly followed by some stroke of satire by way of

palliative to such involuntary deference, that it might not be ascribed to a vulgar or schoolboy-like curiosity.

Three of these dandies, lions of the most distinguished ton, stood opposite the fourth, who, ensconced in an arm-chair, his legs crossed, and his arms carelessly folded, while his head, leaning against the window, was thrown into relief by the red damask curtains behind.

This last, the most remarkable of the four, was a man about forty years old; who at first appeared somewhat younger, but upon a second view, rather older. He was tall, well featured, and of so taper a waist, that a sagacious tailor would have suspected the existence of stays, for the purpose of concealing nascent obesity. Dressed with the most exquisite simplicity, the three great attributes of birth, wealth, and intelligence, were manifest in his person. In the street, the common herd forgave his straw-coloured gloves in favour of his distinguished appearance. In the drawing-room, every first-

rate woman pronounced him charming. His superiority of soul, and the brilliant intelligence of his physiognomy seemed to arise from mental capacity; and on beholding him, Diogenes would at once have extinguished his lantern.

This favourite of nature was now the topic of conversation in the little group. He bore the pleasantries and quizzing of his friends with the perfect good humour of one too sure of his dignity to take offence; persuaded that he could readily check the excess of familiarity by saying like Louis XIV,—"Hold, gentlemen—the king is coming."

"As we are upon the chapter of Choisy," said one of the talkers, "I must tell you the most unheard of, the most extraordinary—"

"We have all read Madame de Sévigné's letters," interrupted the king of the lions; "so, to the fact."

"The fact is this," said the young man who in consideration of his youth dared not pretend to a higher degree of dignity than that of a

lion's whelp. "This morning, in passing by Tortoni's, I saw with horror our friend Choisy's favourite mare, Rebecca, mounted—guess by whom?"

"You are mistaken Marcenay!" replied a good looking young man, wearing the almost forgotten order of Malta, "Choisy, upon principle, never lends his horses."

"I tell you she was mounted by some lineal descendant of Goliath, whose feet embarrassed the mare's fetlocks, while his head came in contact with the lanterns suspended across the street. On seeing him pass, the people repeated the fable of La Fontaine, exclaiming with one accord, 'poor beast!—had heaven been just, the rider should carry the horse!'"

"Is this true, Choisy?" said a spare little man, who had not yet spoken, "you refused to lend me Rebecca for Chantilly, and now suffer her to drag about an elephant!"

"You may indeed say so," said the Viscount de Choisy, smiling. "Rebecca returned home

in such a condition, that my groom got drunk in despair. At this moment, she is lying on her litter, with her groom beside her, both half dead."

"And who pray is this Patagonian?" inquired Monsieur de Marcenay.

"Monsieur de Beaupré, a country neighbour of mine in the Nivernais. During his short stay in Paris, this is the third horse he has destroyed. Orson is lamed, and Wallace has broken both his knees."

"Beaupré?" replied the little spare man. "That reminds me that, on Monday last, Randeuil, du Bellay, a few others, and myself, were shooting in the preserves of Choisy. After four hours' walking, we had not so much as seen the shadow of a hare or rabbit; and on expressing our astonishment, the Viscount's keeper replied to us, that since Monsieur de Beaupré had permission to sport in those woods, it was in vain to fire off a gun, for that he kills and carries away every thing. This Nimrod

is, doubtless, the Goliath to whom Marcenay alludes."

"Himself," replied the Viscount.

"And so you allow him to ransack your woods, you who lately refused the Duke of Boisbriant a day's shooting, of which, between ourselves, he complains bitterly."

"Let him complain to Monsieur de Beaupré. I certainly gave him the right of life and death over my rabbits."

"And your horses also?" added the knight of Malta. "Such generosity cannot be without a motive; were you in debt, I could almost think him some creditor, whose heart you would fain soften."

"Were you ambitious," said the little spare man, "I should fancy he had some influence in the approaching election."

"And I," said the youngest, "bet ten to one that he is simply a married man, in which case I yield my absolution to Choisy."

"Good, Marcenay, very good!" replied the

Viscount; "you come nearer the truth than the others, only that Monsieur de Beaupré has been a widower these fifteen years."

"Enough of Beaupré!" said the knight of Malta. "I have another grievance against Choisy, on which you shall decide. Yesterday, which is nothing new, he asked me to dinner."

"That is surely a pardonable offence," replied Marcenay.

"Had the party consisted of two, or even four. But whom do you think I found for third and last?—a disciple of the college of St. Sulpice, blushing at every word, in whose honour, as it was Friday, we fasted, like three reverend fathers of the church; ay, devoutly fasted upon turbot, mullet, and pine apples."

"I am sorry my dinner did not suit you," said Choisy drily.

"It was not the dinner, it was the jesuit who displeased me. I could not imagine what he was muttering as we sat down to table, which proved to be the benedicite."

"I beg to observe," replied the Viscount

"that a knight of Malta ought at least to call cousins with a jesuit; besides, Monsieur de Luscourt is no more a jesuit than yourself. He is well born, and thanks to his mother has received an education in which religion has not been overlooked. I see nothing to laugh at in this. Believe me, sneers, à la Voltaire, are out of date."

"My dear fellow," said Marcenay, "you are really too edifying! I do not despair of seeing you one day decked in pontificalibus, and giving us a second volume of Frère Ange de Joyeuse."

"Pending which, Choisy is learning the dowager game of boston," interrupted the little spare man. "At the last party at Madame de Candeille's, I saw him seated as partner to a strange looking being, commonly known by the name of Escarbagnas, in consequence of her florid style of dress exceeding any thing which ever graced the circles of Brives la Gaillarde or of Castelnaudary."

The four friends laughed immoderately at this sally.

"Allow me," said Choisy, their hilarity being somewhat abated, "to enlighten you upon one or two of the subjects which excite your mirth. Know, then, that the Countess of Escarbagnas mentioned by Bertier is, in reality, the Marchioness de Gardagne, mother to the virtuous Monsieur de Luscourt, whom Villaret met yesterday at my table; and that this same Luscourt, is son-in-law to Monsieur de Beaupré, the terror of grooms and gamekeepers.—You are all three geniuses. Be pleased to guess."

"What?" inquired Bertier.

The Viscount shrugged his shoulders, and looked inquiringly at the other two.

"I imagine you to have organised a plan of seduction against this family of antidiluvians," said the knight of Malta; "but for what purpose, I am as ignorant as Bertier."

"And you, Marcenay?" inquired the Prince of fashion of the aspiring whelp.

At this appeal to his acuteness, the youth seemed to ponder.

"Is there not a fourth person of the family, as yet unmentioned?" said he, with a smile.

"Marcenay, you will make your way in the world," replied Choisy; "your seniors ought to blush in listening to you. Yes, there exists a fourth—but somewhat less antidiluvian than the rest."

The voice of the servant, announcing the names at the door, now predominated over the confused murmur of the assembly; and two names immediately re-echoed one after the other—"The Marchioness de Gardagne!" —"The Countess de Luscourt!"

The same feeling of curiosity caused each of the friends to turn round. The Viscount also rose; and the eyes of all four were fixed upon the entrance of the room.

CHAPTER II.

The first person who entered was a fat man of jovial appearance, whose head, half grey, half bald, towered six inches above the others, like the brow of Ajax in the Iliad. Profiting by his colossal weight, the gift of nature, he penetrated the crowd in line direct, without meeting with the least resistance; for one might as well have obstructed the road to a horse in full gallop, as impede his progress. This living bastion escorted an elderly lady, dressed in a dark brown gown, her head covered with one of those dowager caps, which might be the work of Macbeth's witches, so impossible is it to assign them an exact definition. Under a black velvet brim, fantasti-

cally distorted, and tricked up with little red feathers, were two weasel-like eyes, and a nose peeping inquisitively at her teeth. Behind this couple, came another no less remarkable, but of a different kind; a young man about twenty-five, of distinguished appearance, but with a face whose meekness of expression was almost sanctimonious, giving his arm to one of the most fascinating women who had as yet made her appearance. To describe her, one must have recourse to the palette of the old sonneteers, on which white and red, ebony, auburn, and celestial blue, are alone admitted. To adopt their language, in speaking of our heroine, her eyes were diamonds, surmounted by arches of jet, her glossy hair divided upon her brow, resembled two raven's wings, symmetrically enclosing a globe of alabaster. Upon her cheek, raged a war betwixt the lily and the rose; her lips, when closed, were of rubies, when open, pearls. To be brief, and replacing the delicate pencil of Dorat in its musky case,

the lady upon whom the attention of Choisy and his friends was concentrated, was one of the most enchanting specimens of dark beauty well to be imagined. The magic contour of her waist was displayed to the utmost advantage in a dress of bright crimson velvet, and had her numerous diamonds been united in a crown upon her head, her air of youthful royalty would have rendered her the fitting occupant of a throne. Beautiful and proud, she passed on with easy dignity, her companion seeming rather to derive support from her than to impart it.

"Well," said the Viscount, turning with a smile towards his friends, "what say you?"

"Beautiful!" replied Bertier; "but ill dressed, and carrying her head too high. She takes up too much room in the world; something in the style of her father, the drum-major."

"That is precisely what pleases me most in her," said the knight of Malta. "She is only twenty, fresh from the provinces, as one

may perceive, by the blazing gown and diamonds of the date of Louis XIV. Nevertheless, in spite of these two incongruities, she has produced a great effect here. She puts me in mind of the Queen of Sheba approaching the throne of Solomon."

"Had she less colour, I should think her irreproachable," observed Marcenay, who, as the slave of fashion, was devoted to the worship of pallid beauties of the interesting school.

Choisy eyed his friends with an air of disdain.

"You are right," said he; "she dresses ill, walks ill, and has many other defects, not instantly perceptible. Her education is not complete. But do not alarm yourselves—it has begun."

"*You* have undertaken it, then?" inquired Marcenay. "I congratulate you, my dear fellow! I would fain dispute the task with you, had I not urgent occupations. Above all,

bleach her, I entreat. Rose colour is the type of vulgarity."

"How far have you proceeded?" inquired the knight of Malta. "Is it summer or harvest time?"

Choisy muttered a few indistinct words.

Meanwhile, the lane so victoriously achieved by the irresistable progress of Madame de Beaupré, had allowed Madame de Gardagne and her daughter-in-law, to penetrate as far as the second drawing-room, where they were seated side by side. Monsieur de Luscourt took up a position behind his wife's chair, to which he appeared screwed down; an assiduity generally attributed to jealousy, but which proceeded solely from shyness. On the other hand, Monsieur Beaupré indulging in the locomotion for which lazy people have so troublesome a tendency, began a peregrination through the apartments, seeking out his acquaintances, rushing through the compactest masses, and totally regardless of the ladies'

trimmings, or the superlative varnish of the men. One of the first persons he met, was the Viscount de Choisy, whom he immediately seized by the button.

"My dear fellow!" said he, in a double bass voice which would have put to the proof the nerves of a young elephant—"thanks to you, I have had an enchanting ride! Rebecca is the pleasantest hack I ever mounted. I fear, though, she will give you a sad account of me. I fancy I tired her."

"She will recover," replied the Viscount, politely.

"In taking her back to her stable, I perceived another horse, and for the first time: dark bay, short tail, Norman head, which would just suit me. A horse's head should always cover its rider. In the army, we consider that a first rate advantage. What is the name of the dark bay?"

"Mario," replied the Viscount, suppressing a sigh.

"Well, then, to-morrow I will make his acquaintance; that is to say, with your permission."

"I need not assure you that my whole stud is at your orders," replied Choisy, who secretly felt that he deserved expulsion from the jockey club.

"Have you wished the ladies good evening?" inquired Beaupré.

"I was looking for them."

"You will find them at the other end of the drawing-room. Pray thaw the deportment of that mummy of a son-in-law of mine. He bores me to death with his quaker-like style of dress and manners.—Are there cards?"

"Yes, in the room to the right."

"I saw a gun at Lepage's yesterday. If I could only win five hundred francs, your rabbits should tell you news of it."

At length left to himself, the Viscount began by adjusting the lappel of his coat, somewhat deranged by the energetic twitchings of Beau-

pré's colossal fingers; who, among other familiarities, had a trick of seizing those he addressed by the collar. He then crossed the room, and halted before Madame de Luscourt, seated between her mother-in-law and husband. In spite of his meek appearance, Choisy could not but compare the latter with the dragon of the Hesperides. As to the Marchioness, he had long since exhausted the vocabulary of epithets applicable to an inconvenient duenna.

The swain of forty stood transfixed, when the Countess d'Agost, the lady of the house, stood before him, with the confiding smile which women sometimes bestow upon men of the world.

"I am in a sad dilemma," said she; "the old Duchess of Rieux is just come in, and if I cannot make up her Boston, she will never forgive me! I see only Monsieur Martonie who is willing to sacrifice himself."

"Here is Madame de Gardagne, to whom

such a proposition will be too acceptable, and by no means a penance."

"And will you be the fourth, then?" asked Madame d'Agost, smiling. "I hear that at Madame de Candeille's you edified all the world."

"I entreat you, be generous! Allow me to enjoy the pleasures of this delightful party," said he, in a persuasive tone.

"Provided you find me a substitute."

Choisy looked rapidly around him, and seeing Marcenay close at hand, fondly caressing his mustachios, led him up to the mistress of the house.

"Thank the Countess," said he, in a solemn tone, "who has done you the honour of naming you as partner of the Duchess of Rieux."

The young man bowed mechanically, but on raising his head, his countenance had assumed an expression of amazement which provoked

an unavoidable burst of laughter from Madame d'Agost.

"Come," said she, "I will present you to a charming partner, who, I trust, will prove a compensation for your disappointment with the dowager duchess."

Without allowing him time to hesitate, she took him straight up to Madame de Gardagne, to whom Marcenay found himself compelled to offer his arm to proceed to the card-room; which he did with the resignation of a criminal about to be executed, after a glance of furious indignation at his friend.

The duenna was thus disposed of. The conjugal dragon remained.

Without loss of time, Choisy went in search of the knight of Malta, who was wandering from room to room.

"You must pay me my yesterday's dinner," said he, smiling.

Villaret put his hand in his pocket.

"For twenty francs, I should have fared bet-

ter at the Café de Paris. What is your price?"

"Half an hour's conversation with Monsieur de Luscourt."

"Dear at the price! Of what can I talk to such a man, except the council of Trent, or the Pragmatic sanction?"

"Talk to him of the last work of Abbé de la Mennais, or a chapter concerning your beloved order. He is a paragon of erudition on all useless subjects."

"Thank you! Well! I owe you something for the games of billiards you won of old Darient, for the sake of his wife and me. I will do my best."

The Chevalier de Villaret now made the round of the room, and found himself, as if by chance, at the side of Monsieur de Luscourt, whom he addressed most graciously. The provincial received him with the awkwardness of a man who approaches the shores of a world to which he is an utter alien. A servant entered, carry-

ing a tray of refreshment, when Villaret gently pushed Monsieur de Luscourt in order to free the passage; but yielding to the reflux of the crowd, he accidentally hustled him into the recess of the window, where he contrived to mask his view completely by the curtains. The knight of Malta instantly looked out for his friend, but he had already quitted his place. Choisy attached himself to the side of the lady thus deprived of both her guardians.

CHAPTER III.

On perceiving the Viscount approach with a smile on his countenance, Madame de Luscourt felt an internal satisfaction which a coquette would have suppressed, and in which vanity had a larger share than sympathy. Her looks brightened as if by enchantment. Scarcely permitting her admirer to finish the compliment he was about to address her, she observed "Are you not afraid of compromising yourself by acknowledging one so little known as I am?" and while pronouncing these words as emphatically as if she had underlined them, her expressive eyes turned resentfully towards a group of females near at hand.

Choisy closely observing this disdainful pantomime, guessed that the provincial beauty had received one of those humiliating rebuffs to which strangers, newly embarked in Parisian society are so often exposed; the proverbial vanity of old France being an absolute phrase. In proportion as the aristocratic principle is banished from our laws, it appears to take refuge in our manners, entrenching itself in a spirit of exclusiveness becoming more confirmed by every successive political shock. That which is called the world in Paris, is composed of a series of drawing rooms. To pass from one to another is a social promotion, sure of provoking envy on the one hand, and malice on the other.

Provincial in all her connections, Madame de Luscourt found herself coldly received in the circle to which she was introduced through the influence of her mother-in-law. Her unquestionable beauty, by at once achieving the conquest of the men, had deprived her of all claim to the benevolent sympathy of her own

sex. Insignificant, she might have been tolerated; but being distinguished, she was a topic of discussion. At this moment, even the group near her, of which every individual had the most obvious reasons for declaring war to pretty faces, was subjecting her to one of those pitiless dissections, like that of a flower pulled leaf from leaf in the hands of the botanist till it remains devoid of colour and perfume.

Readily penetrating their views, Choisy, like a man of experience, resolved to turn it to account. Instead of answering the question addressed to him, he replied by an interrogation.

"My prophecy then is accomplished?" asked he, with a smile.

"What prophecy?" replied Madame de Luscourt, with affected surprise.

"Alas for my humiliation! Is such the value you attach to my words? Did I not tell you, that upon coming to Paris, you need not hope to win the admiration of your own sex?"

"I did not understand you at the time, and still hesitate to believe you. How can I have become an object of aversion, harmless and insignificant as I am? With what can those ladies reproach me, whom I scarcely know, and who seem to be so unkindly busy?"

"You are guilty of many offences, of which you little dream," said the Viscount significantly. "How can you hope to please Madame de la Chatenede for instance, who, till now, boasted the finest eyes in Paris?"

"Have I disparaged her eyes? On the contrary, I admire them, and see none to be compared with them in the room."

"Others have better opportunities, which she will never forgive you."

This compliment was too direct to be misunderstood by Madame de Luscourt.

"I rather think," said she, "that the Gothic fashion of my diamonds, and my unfortunate velvet dress, are bringing down upon me their impertinent scrutiny. I fear I look very ridiculous."

"You would bring ridicule itself into fashion," replied Monsieur de Choisy, with the trite gallantry of a middle aged man. "But since you appeal to my frankness, why, upon the subject of dress, do you not consult your own taste in preference to that of other people."

"What can I do?" said Madame de Luscourt. "This dress is a present from my husband, my diamonds from my mother-in-law; and both are so sacred in my eyes, that were I to look like a shopkeeper's wife of the Rue St. Denis, I should not change them."

To this confidence, accompanied by a look of involuntary irony, the Viscount inclined his head with an air of hypocritical veneration.

"I am silenced!" said he. "The taste of Madame de Luscourt must of course be law. But allow me to suggest another grievance with which you offend the world, and of which, I, more than any one, presume to complain. Why allow your enemies to triumph by refusing every invitation? Yesterday, I expected to see you at Madame Laurencin's."

"My husband was indisposed," said Madame de Luscourt.

"But to-morrow you will come to Madame d'Albenay's?"

"To-morrow is my mother-in-law's favourite day for being ill."

"How provoking!" said the confidant, with a serious air.

"On Monday, you will at least go to the Opera? They give the Huguenots. I shall take care that you have your favorite box."

Madame de Luscourt hesitated, before she ventured to reply.

"I am quite concerned for the trouble you have taken," said she, somewhat embarrassed, "but pardon me if I do not profit by your offer. For reasons which command my utmost respect, Monsieur de Luscourt does not frequent the theatre. Though my own free agent, it would be little decorous in me to appear less rigid than my husband. Believe me, it is a sacrifice which merits appreciation," said she smiling.

"To a provincial recluse, the Opera presents such temptation! But what merit would there be in renouncing a pleasure for which there was no regret?"

"Monsieur de Luscourt appears little disposed to admit the maxim, 'the husband reigns but does not govern,'" replied the Viscount with a sneer. "His inquisitorial administration descends to details. He has already interdicted novel reading and waltzing. Now, it is the Opera to-morrow it will be dancing; or riding. I am rather surprised he should still tolerate music and embroidery! Be patient; the interdiction will soon arrive. Some would call this tyranny. I only see a very logical system of government, maintained with the most marvellous perseverance. Yes, Monsieur de Luscourt has conquered, I will not say my regard, (you would not believe me,) but my admiration. His policy is as profound as it is courteous. Had he at once overwhelmed you with the weight of his

pretensions, you would have probably resisted. With much foresight, he has proceeded step by step, so that passive obedience, on your part, has become a matter of course. This result is the more admirable, that, in seeing you together, one is more inclined to believe in the mild sway of the queen, than the despotism of the king."

Madame de Luscourt listened to these sarcasms with calmness and without interruption. But she quickly assumed the dignity of a woman who respects herself and the will of her husband.

"I cannot see any thing ridiculous in the fulfilment of a duty," said she, with a serious air. "Besides, it is the advice of Monsieur de Luscourt, and not his dictation in which I acquiesce."

"It is more polite and less hazardous, to advise than to command," replied the wary middle-aged man.

Madame de Luscourt now opened and shut her fan several times with nervous impatience.

While watching this passing cloud, the Viscount relapsed into an air of tender resignation.

"Pardon me," said he in his softest voice, "in speaking of him, I have again disobeyed you. But could I persuade you how much I suffer in seeing you condemned to such seclusion, such slavery, you would be more forbearing with me. Your mother-in-law has transformed your house into an actual fortress, to which I am forced to lay siege, that I may enjoy the happiness of seeing you once in ten times. Must I also give up all hope of meeting you in the world?"

"I believe so," replied Madame de Luscourt, gravely.

"Explain yourself, I entreat!" cried the Viscount.

"Paris pleases neither my husband nor my mother-in-law; and as the minority does not give the law, we depart in two days for the country house of one of my aunts, Madame de Selve. Do you know her?"

"You are actually going away!" exclaimed the Viscount, with the vivacity of a lover of twenty years of age. But he had not time to conclude; for at that moment, the clerical figure of Monsieur de Luscourt appeared behind his wife, having at last escaped from the insidious civilities of the knight of Malta; and Choisy, compelled to enter into general conversation, soon bowed and left the room.

Shortly after, Choisy accosted a middle aged man, who was passing the evening in perambulating from one room to another; bowing, smiling, simpering, shaking hands, and saying civil things to every body in turn.

"D'Agost!" said he, "I wish to write a letter. Where shall I find all I want?"

"In my study," replied the master of the house. "Go there, and you will find some small rose-coloured paper, which I suspect is what you want."

"Precisely!"

The two men exchanged a smile of intelligence, and d'Agost resumed his civilities ; while the Viscount, preceded by a servant, ascended to the second story, on descending from which, about twenty minutes afterwards, he returned to the drawing-room, where he found the newly married couple precisely in the position in which he had left them. Monsieur de Luscourt had taken root behind his wife's chair, who, regardless of his presence, was playing with her bouquet, with an air of absence of mind.

" Decidedly he is insupportable !" thought her admirer. " But he must be a good sentinel if he prevent this letter from reaching its address."

To convey a note to a married woman, in the presence of her husband, if she be willing to receive it, is a feat worthy of a school-boy ; neither does forcing her to accept it against her will, offer any insurmountable difficulty. The

feats of the Viscount of that nature rendered the present an affair of mere experience. Having decided his plans, he seated himself by the side of Madame de Luscourt.

"Could the envy of the world secure a triumph, yours is indeed complete," said he, with an insidious smile. "Your very bouquet is the subject of jealousy."

The Viscount held out his hand for the object to which he alluded, admired it, inhaled the perfume, examined the flowers one after the other, then, with a dexterity worthy of a conjuror, inserted the tiny rose-coloured note under the petals of a beautiful camellia! Enchanted with his own adroitness, he returned the bouquet to Madame de Luscourt, who presented it to her husband, as if to punish, by a piece of conjugal coquetry, the rash familiarity of her admirer.

"Maxime," said she, "all these compliments are your due. See how they approve your taste."

The ingenuous husband inserted his nose amongst the precious exotics, without perceiving in the midst of them a slight odour of amber, which announced the hidden snake in the grass. In spite of his self-possession, Monsieur de Choisy felt alarmed on seeing his note in the possession of the husband; and inclining towards the guileless woman, whispered,

"Take back your bouquet!" Madame de Luscourt looked surprised. "Open it when alone, you will then understand me," said the Viscount de Choisy.

Agitated by these mysterious words, the young wife instinctively extended her hand to her husband; but at the moment he acquiesced in that mute demand, the intervention of a fourth personage gave a new feature to the scene. Like one of those malicious fairies, who in a fairy-tale, appear when least expected, the old Marchioness de la Gardagne presented herself suddenly behind her daughter-in-

law's chair. With an eagerness remarkable for her age, she grasped the insidious bouquet, before the former was able to lay hold of it; giving the Viscount a look, which almost put the man of the world out of countenance.

"Where the deuce does she start from?" said he to himself. "Impossible that she should have seen me! But these old hags have an instinct of mischief equivalent to a sixth sense."

Recovering his self-possession, he offered his arm-chair to the old lady, with the most formal politeness; but while thanking him with icy politeness, instead of sitting down, she addressed her daughter-in-law:

"Your carriage is waiting," said she; "shall we go?"

Madame de Luscourt rose without answering, and looked alternately at the bouquet and the Viscount, whom she dared not interrogate. An expressive glance from him soon prompted that marvellous presence of mind which, in

sudden perplexities, endows the sex with such wonderful superiority. Leaning her hand upon the back of her chair, she let fall the boa she had placed there. Monsieur de Choisy, quickly picked up the fallen sable, and in order to present it, leant closely towards her, indifferent to the observations of the old Marchioness.

"What does all this mean?" briefly inquired Madame de Luscourt.

"I have written what I dared not utter!" replied he.

"How?—a letter?"

"And concealed, alas! in the bouquet."

Collecting himself, Choisy now took leave of the party, completed by the arrival of Monsieur de Beaupré. Madame de Luscourt forgot her admirer as soon as departed, and only thought of recovering her bouquet. She succeeded without even a request, her mother-in-law giving it to her as soon as they were side by side in the carriage. But it was in vain she searched the flowers: she found nothing.

"He only wanted to frighten me!" thought she; "and I was stupid to have imagined him in earnest. He can have nothing to write, and must be aware that I am not a woman to read that to which I should not think proper to listen."

CHAPTER IV.

That evening, or rather that night, no sooner was Madame de Gardagne alone, than she carefully emptied her pockets; immense sacks in which she could deposit her lap-dog, without personal inconvenience. On this occasion, in addition to her purse and snuff-box, she drew forth the tiny rose-coloured note! Her withered hand seemed to grate the surface of the vellum, as she opened it; and after placing her spectacles upon her nose, began to read it—a humiliation little anticipated by the Viscount.

Having deciphered the tender epistle with the utmost minuteness of attention, the Mar-

chioness relapsed into a meditation too important to the development of this recital, not to demand attention.

Madame de Gardagne was one of those cold, harsh, serious women, whose manners are rather the result of sad experience of life, than natural austerity of character. Twice married, she had tasted the bitterest lees of the cup into which a short honeymoon sheds deceitful sweetness.

Her first husband, the Count de Luscourt, a nobleman of the old school, an indefatigable sportsman, a hard drinker, a prodigal—gallant with the ladies, even with his wife—terminated his existence in a duel at the age of fifty; realizing one of those destinies which reduce the task of the genealogists, to a name and a couple of dates.

Exceeding the aristocratic delinquencies of his predecessor, Monsieur de Gardagne had ruined himself at play; and fortunately for his wife, a timely death interposed to save her

dower from the gulph from which neither fame nor fortune return. A bitter want of faith in the possibility of happiness, a sincere contempt for men, justified by double experience, constituted the dower with which she entered widowhood for the second time. On the other hand, the tree of misfortune had put forth wholesome fruits. Taking refuge in religion, the consolation of suffering hearts, Madame de Gardagne had acquired, on the flinty road of fate, an experience never found in a path of flowers. Religion and knowledge of the business of life simultaneously developed themselves in her mind. Without losing sight of heaven, the supreme consolation, she engaged in the complicated duties caused by a double widowhood, as well as the care of an only son, the issue of her first marriage. Renouncing all hope of personal happiness, she concentrated her solicitude upon this her only child. In a few years, one of those female administrations, which more than one economist

might accept as model, closed the breach made, by paternal prodigality, in the inheritance of young Luscourt. The redemption of her son's fortune would have seemed to her the first of worldly duties; but that a duty superior to the claim of positive interests, pervaded every faculty of her soul.

To render Maxime a being wholly different from the two husbands assigned her by the wrath of destiny, became, for Madame de Gardagne, the most important care of her existence.

The faults of her two husbands had always appeared the result of the frivolous education of the French nobility, previous to the revolution; and the Marchioness, passing to another extreme, fell into the errors of excessive severity. Immured till the age of twenty in a secluded country house, in the heart of the Nivernais, the youth of Maxime was sheltered from the corruption of the age under the shield of maternal solicitude, while pursuing his studies under the eye of a priest, as

learned as he was austere. As the custom of the times compelled her to adopt the rules of university education, Madame de Gardagne at length conducted her son to Paris, where she did not lose sight of him an instant during the period of his more critical studies. Every day, at the termination of his studies at the College as well as afterwards at the School of Law, the spotless lamb returned to the fold which his mother had provided him in a retired street near the Church of St. Sulpice. At twenty three years of age, he took the degree of licentiate; ignorant, except by name, of the resorts usually frequented by the young students of Paris.

The projects of the Marchioness had thus fully succeeded. In return for her solicitude, too, she had secured the most profound gratitude on the part of her charge; the most unlimited obedience, and a respect worthy of the olden time. After steering safely through the Parisian archipelago, in which so many youthful fortunes are wrecked, the mother's next

desire was to complete her work by steering her new Telemachus into the salutary port of marriage. She thought it right and prudent that the finer feelings of the heart should no longer remain inactive under an abnegation as unnatural as perilous. The youth of Maxime had been wasting in a garden undecked with flowers. It was time the fragrant rose should embellish this arid sterility.

Her choice soon fixed itself upon Mademoiselle de Beaupré, who, to the endowments of birth and fortune, added those of beauty. She had been brought up in the country; a paramount advantage in the estimation of her mother-in-law, who indulged in a provincial prejudice against girls brought up in Paris. Maxime, in this instance, exhibited the implicit docility to which he had been constant from his infancy; and as the woman to whom he was to be united was charming, the fulfilment of a duty promised to be the source of genuine happiness.

Marriage emancipates women from maternal restraint. Brought up like a girl, Maxime had some right to the benefit of the law, and in equity, his mother resolved not to contest it. Madame de Gardagne saw, however, that the power she had till then possessed, would be usurped by the influence of another; and though the mother would have abdicated without regret, the mother-in-law exercised more imperious pretensions, than ever, to the family throne.

The education of Madame de Luscourt offered, in every particular, a direct contrast to that of her husband. Deprived from childhood of maternal care, she had always lived in the country with Monsieur de Beaupré; and the dictatorial habits of the portly gentleman ended in imparting a certain independence to the manners of his daughter.

Till her marriage, Flavie de Beaupré evinced little taste for the accomplishments in which young ladies usually excel. She was awkward

with her needle and pencil, and held the piano in supreme contempt. To make amends, she rode with an intrepidity recalling the fable of the amazons; shot flying—and, thanks to the lessons of her father, handled the foils like a Bradamante. In a word, she excelled in all the exercises which Madame de Gardagne, in her maternal foresight, had interdicted to her son.

So complete a contrast in the habits of the newly married couple was somewhat embarrassing; and for some time, they contemplated each other with a curiosity bordering upon anxiety. In the most daring flights of his imagination, Maxime had foreseen in his wife some gentle sister of the angelic choir; while Flavie, on the contrary, had never dreamt of a future husband but with a sword flashing in his hand. The young man was well content to exchange his visions for so charming a reality; but Madame de Luscourt was less prompt in the modification of her opinions.

The rare qualities of her husband, his filial obedience, his exaltation of character, and his strict religious observances, commanded involuntary respect. But she was not blind to the wretchedness of his seat on horseback, or to his timidity of manner. From this consciousness, resulted a feeling more akin to pity than to love, in which some particles of irony occasionally insinuated themselves. In a short time, Flavie conceived an invincible aversion to the qualities which at first commanded her profound veneration. The almost monastic rigidity of Monsieur de Luscourt seemed a reproof to the genuine, though less austere piety in which she had been reared. Every night, did Maxime prolong his prayers and meditations; still his wife, content only with rational piety, could not but consider these conjugal orisons an hour or two too long. On Sundays, the high mass at which his wife attended, did not suffice for Maxime, who returned to vespers, and

could scarcely tear himself away at the conclusion of the service.

"I am almost afraid," thought she, "he would have done better to take holy orders than enter the estate of matrimony."

Poets have sometimes maintained that women are visible angels, intermediating between man and the divinity; and, by a tacit acquiescence, mankind have conceded this polite error. A woman will consequently pardon all superiority in a husband save that which infringes her divine prerogative.

The most intolerant devotee bends to the control of a sinner she is likely to convert, sooner than to a saint whose example is a reproof, preferring to give the example, rather than receive it. Madame de Luscourt grew impatient under the supremacy of virtue she was perpetually compelled to acknowledge. Her husband's ascetic perfection, and the scrupulous discharge of his religious duties, seemed so many feathers plucked from her angelic wings.

In spite of the frankness and vivacity of her character, the young wife contrived to mask her progressive displeasure under a semblance of humility and deference towards her husband of which *he* was the dupe. But Madame de Gardagne, on seeing the clouded state of the conjugal horizon, experienced considerable anxiety.

There exist in the world, individuals who assume towards women the cruel despotism of birds of prey towards the more timid of the feathered tribe. As we have already intimated the Viscount de Choisy was one of these vultures, ever hovering over guileless innocence and unsuspecting virtue. Conformably to the habits of the day, he had pity upon the unmarried portion of the sex; though there *were* occasions in which his self-denial made exceptions. Residing in the neighbourhood of Monsieur de Beaupré, he had manifested towards Flavie only the most careless attentions; but on her marriage, she suddenly

assumed the value of a diamond in the hands of an expert lapidary. To the Viscount, Madame de Luscourt presented a triumph to be achieved, as uniting all the qualities which tend to gratify self-love and vanity, the supreme stimulus of lady killers. The project of this modern Don Juan was instantly decided. A favourable opportunity was alone wanting, and the journey of the newly married couple to Paris being decided, without loss of time he set to work.

At forty, the chances of such success are doubtful. The nobler portal of the heart is open only to youth; though the various caprices of feminine vanity offer encouragement too frequently to the pretensions of male flirts. The Viscount adopted a system of persuasive gallantry, which, though in appearance tame, took an oblique line not unlikely to attain its object. While aiming at the part of a lover, he contented himself with that of confi-

dant; a part of secondary importance in appearance, but possessing innumerable resources for those who know how to profit by them.

By degrees, in spite of the vigilance of the mother-in-law and the sanctimoniousness of the husband, Madame de Luscourt became engaged with him in terms of intimacy, limited at first to an exchange of insignificant gossip such as usually forms the staple of fashionable conversation; but which daily assumed a more serious tone, renouncing the passing fancies of the mind for the outpourings of sentiment. The respectable age of Monsieur de Choisy, his craftiness of mind, his persuasive manners, and more than all, his profound knowledge of the sex, permitted him to take up a position in which many more skilful champions might have failed. Under the pretence of doing the honours of Paris to the provincials, he established his intimacy in the family; and we have seen at what cost of

broken-kneed horses, heads of game, and games of boston, he purchased his footing in the house.

Applying the rules of military art to his present siege, the Viscount began by mining the three formidable bastions with which Madame de Luscourt was flanked. The mother-in-law was dismantled without firing a shot; thanks to the spirit of revolt peculiar to daughters-in-law, in which the besieger had found a powerful auxiliary. The husband still held firm, but the constant praises of the merits of Maxime by his young wife appeared almost an affectation. As to Monsieur de Beaupré, any precaution on his account was quite superfluous, for the lusty gentleman belonged to that class of fathers of families, who as soon as their daughters are married, think they have accomplished their paternal duties, and say in the joy of their heart, "the rest regards my son-in-law."

At the period of the commencement of this

recital, Monsieur de Choisy had so dexterously managed these preliminaries, that he fancied all scruples as to a declaration were unnecessary. In abstaining from an explicit avowal, he seemed rather to forego a right, than submit to a necessity. Congratulating himself on the ground he had gained, he was satisfied with his slow, but gradual progress, as a traveller pauses to view the landscape at leisure.

The sudden announcement of Madame de Luscourt's departure, however, induced him no longer to temporize. The Viscount felt that he must anticipate the coming blow; and the result was the letter which was now causing such acute uneasiness to the mother of Maxime.

CHAPTER V.

Madame de Gardagne sat reflecting upon the Viscount's letter with profound attention. After reading it, she was on the point of committing it to the flames; but she suddenly locked it up as carefully, as though she had been a beauty, and the billet a love-letter of her own.

"It is the first," said she; "my fears are relieved! But my vigilance may not always be equally successful. This man is of the most unceasing perseverance. Obstacles only serve to incite him. How am I to act? How ward off the misfortune which threatens my son? In spite of his piety, Maxime is a man of spirit; and had he the least suspicion, I am convinced

he would insult this reckless hero. A duel must ensue, in which he would fall like his father. I could not survive such an ordeal! One does not mourn for a son as for a husband, —one dies of grief!—These professed gallants are, after all, so many assassins! Monsieur de Beaupré has boasted to me of Monsieur de Choisy's prowess, and my poor boy has never had a lesson in fencing. Maxime shall know nothing of it. His noble, innocent soul is unfitted for such torments. I will protect him. Flavie is only a coquette. There may be time to check the disease before it invades her mind and heart. Not a moment is to be lost. In a few days, it were perhaps too late!"

To rekindle in the soul of her daughter-in-law, in the absence of conjugal love, the principles of duty so nearly extinct, was her first object; and among those around her to whom she could look for support, she fixed upon Monsieur de Beaupré, her natural ally on a family question.

"What think you of Monsieur de Choisy?" said she to the old gentleman, taking him aside after breakfast.

"Of Choisy? an excellent fellow!" replied he, "a bit of a coxcomb, but a safe friend. They accuse him of giving himself airs, but *I* have nothing to say against him. He has the finest horses in Paris, and I ride them whenever it suits me."

"Do you esteem his character?"

"Of course I do. A man who lends his horses like a true friend! Look at his stable! —a palace!—all marble and mahogany.—His horses are small, indeed, or possibly I am a *leetle* heavy."

"I want your opinion of his character, not of his horses," interrupted Madame de Gardagne.

"A capital fellow, as I told you before.—I am to ride Mario this morning, for the first time. I wonder he is not here."

The Marchioness grew impatient.

"Cannot you answer me seriously? The question I put to you has a serious motive, to which you would do well to attend.—Is it possible you have never noticed the assiduities of Monsieur de Choisy towards——"

"His assiduities? He hardly comes here;" replied Flavie's father.

The dowager smiled ironically.

"While you ride his horses or shoot his rabbits," said she, "he is sure not to meet you. But I tell you that he comes here *much* too often, and that his visits have been remarked. Flavie is too beautiful for the attentions of Monsieur de Choisy not to receive an ill founded interpretation. Yesterday evening, for instance, they were the topic of severe observations."

"Mere envy! Because Choisy is successful in the world."

"In our house, at least, his success shall be moderate. In a word," continued the Marchioness, "the conduct of Monsieur de Choisy

is such as, if it do not commit Flavie, must at least embarrass her, which is a sufficient reason for any step I may take. To-morrow we go into the country to Madame de Selve. It is useless to attempt anything in the interim. But at our return to Paris, I beg you will make the Viscount understand that his visits would be more agreeable if less frequent."

"Lucky enough," replied Beaupré, "for I asked him to pass a fortnight at my sister-in-law's."

"You have actually invited him?" exclaimed Madame de Gardagne. "In that case, we will not go."

"Come, come, my dear Marchioness, do not mount the high horse!" cried Beaupré, good-humouredly. "Why select Monsieur de Choisy more than many others who admire Flavie? Believe me, he is a thousand leagues from any idea of that sort. He has too much to think of. I can speak pertinently upon the subject, for I possess his confidence.

First of all, he is going to be married, not to mention the little girl at the Opera—and very pretty she is. Pardon me, I forgot you knew nothing of that kind. How should he think of Flavie, whom he has known from a child? He is not more attentive to her than he is to other women; and let me tell you, that, as far as that goes, your son would do well to take him for a model, for really poor Luscourt is far from gallant! A regular soldier of the Pope. Flavie told me yesterday—"

"What did she tell you?"

"Nothing of any consequence—mere childishness. After all, if she found Choisy more amusing in conversation last night than your sanctimonious son, it is no crime. It is not for such absurdities I will close my doors against a friend of twenty years' standing, and who has the first horses in Paris. Here is a specimen," said Monsieur de Beaupré, advancing to the window, and his eye fixed upon a full bred horse, led by the groom of Monsieur

de Choisy. In a moment, the old gentleman took up his hat, whip, and gloves, previously laid upon a chair.

"I never keep a good horse waiting; it is a matter of principle with me," said he. "Pray, dear Marchioness, cease bothering my brain with these absurdities. At our age, we must leave young people to themselves. I have delegated my paternal power to Maxime; the rest is his affair. 'Never hazard your finger twixt bark and wood,' says the proverb; and I have sworn never to interfere betwixt my son-in-law and his wife."

"Egotist!" muttered Madame de Gardagne, as soon as he was gone. "Provided he get his riding and shooting, what signifies the rest?"

Finding it in vain to seek the support of Monsieur de Beaupré, the Marchioness remained thoughtful and undetermined. At length, she made up her mind, and proceeded

to a little sitting-room, where she found her daughter-in-law occupied in reading the newspaper.

On seeing her mother-in-law, Madame de Luscourt rose, and offered her easy chair to the old lady. Madame de Gardagne usually accepted this place of honour with the dignity of a dowager of high and noble lineage, in the assertion of her precedence. But this time, she refused.

"Do not disturb yourself, my child," said she, graciously taking another chair. "Why keep your room this divine weather? I thought you were airing with Maxime. The Boulevarts are, I am sure, covered with equipages."

"It is Sunday, is it not?" replied Flavie, coldly. "Maxime is, doubtless, gone to vespers, and I shall pass my day in the English fashion; only that instead of reading sermons, I venture on a newspaper. Rather worldly,

I fear; and when you opened the door, I thought of hiding it, lest it might be my husband."

"You make out poor Maxime more strict than he really is. I do not suppose he forbids your reading what you like."

"Pardon me," said the young wife. "Yesterday, I sent for a new novel; this morning, Maxime, upon finding it on my table, sent it back to the library."

"That was rather despotic, I admit. But in your place," said the Marchioness, trying to smile, "I should deem it a proof of affection, more than any thing else. After all, dear Flavie, there are better books than the last new novel. In seeking to direct your taste in the choice of your studies, Maxime testifies a mark of respect. Cannot you see this?"

"Yes, I understand it all, appreciate it all, submit to it all. If required, I will return to fairy tales, and nursery rhymes."

"I wish to consult you, my dear child, on the

subject of our departure," interrupted the Marchioness, in a persuasive voice.

"I do not see the use of giving my opinion upon a thing almost decided," replied Madame de Luscourt.

"Which means that the journey does not suit you?"

"On the contrary, I rejoice in it. The country in March is delicious. It is true the trees have no leaves, but on the other hand, there is plenty of snow. One may at least enjoy the pleasures of the fireside. How inconceivable that people persist in remaining in Paris till the end of the carnival!"

Since she had become acquainted with Monsieur Beaupré s invitation to the Viscount, Madame de Gardagne looked forward with horror to the projected journey. In spite of her severity of conscience, she concealed the motive of her change of mind; attributing to her son the merit of a decision which she thought might be agreeable to his young wife.

"This sudden passion for the country is inopportune," replied she smiling; "how will you manage? Maxime desires to remain in Paris, thinking it might not be disagreeable to you."

"My duty is to obey," replied Flavie, also smiling, for her ill humour vanished at this unexpected intelligence.

The countenance of the young wife having resumed its usual serenity, a symptom which a skilful diplomatist ought never to undervalue, the Marchioness found herself more embarrassed than at the beginning of the conversation; but her hesitation was brief, for active minds decide rapidly, though they may afterwards repent their precipitation. Till now, she had avoided, in conversing with her daughter-in-law, all reference to the Viscount, knowing full well that to speak of a man gives him consequence, and that contradiction often confirms ill-disposed feelings. But she now determined to put the heart of Flavie to the test.

"It is settled then, that we remain in Paris,"

said she. "In the course of the summer, we shall find means of paying our visit to your aunt. It would have been a pity not to be here for the wedding of Mademoiselle de Cheneceaux."

"It will be magnificent," replied Flavie, "I heard of nothing else at Madame d'Agost's."

"Spring is decidedly the season for marriages," replied Madame de Gardagne; "yesterday, I heard of half-a-dozen, of which the only one I remember is that of our friend Monsieur de Choisy.—Did you hear of it?"

Flavie replied to this interrogation with a look of defiance; while a nervous tremor of the lips succeeded to her previous smiles.

"Monsieur de Choisy about to be married?" said she. "To whom?"

"I have not heard," replied the dowager, pretending not to perceive the anxiety of her daughter-in-law, "but the thing is certain. Monsieur de Choisy has already informed your father of it."

"True," said Flavie, recovering her smiles, and this time speaking with irony, "his marriage with Mademoiselle Villemars,—an old story."

"Old or new, it appears certain, and all the world approves Monsieur de Choisy's abandonment of the school of romance for that of reality."

"Does he really write romances?" inquired Madame de Luscourt, unable to suppress a look of incredulity.

"I forgot you liked that kind of reading, or I should not have made use of the word to define what is the very reverse of romantic," said the Marchioness. "Actresses and figurantes are apt to prefer the positive to the ideal."

"Monsieur de Choisy, then, has an attachment for an actress?" said the young wife, whose indignation now betrayed itself by a crimson blush.

"She is perhaps a singer or dancer, I know not which. Your father is my informant. But your expression is not applicable. At Monsieur de Choisy's age, passion is out of the question."

"There are young men equally unimpassioned," replied Flavie abruptly.

And the Marchioness could not but understand this direct retort upon her son.

"You will allow," said she, "that with a young and pure heart, there is a fairer chance than with one prematurely withered. Though Monsieur de Choisy be a little too mellow to play the gay gallant, he may still make a most excellent husband. At forty-five, it is time to be reasonable."

"You mean thirty-five!" observed Madame de Luscourt, suppressing with difficulty her peevishness.

"Forty-five, if not more. Remember that Monsieur de Choisy is as coquettish about his

looks as a middle-aged woman. Madame d'Agost assured me the other day that he wears stays. Did you ever perceive it?"

"There are many awkward men in the world who would do well to follow his example."

"Unfortunately there is no repairing the pitiless havoc of time," resumed Madame de Gardagne. "The Viscount ages. Yesterday, I watched him closely and discovered signs of maturity, which I had not previously remarked. His hair is getting wonderfully gray."

Flavie remarked with emphasis,

"In *him* one never notices such trifling defects. Monsieur de Choisy is clever, distinguished, amiable, and were I a man, he would be my model." Then, by way of changing the conversation, "As we do not go to Selve," said she, "it would be as well to inform my aunt, who expects us. With your permission, I will write to her."

Without waiting for her mother-in-law's answer, Madame de Luscourt left the room,

slamming the door with puerile impatience. Women are sometimes more vexed by the discovery of their follies, than of their sentiments; and being well versed in the subtile mysteries of feminine organisation, the Marchioness felt much satisfaction in witnessing the ill humour of her daughter-in-law.

"If she really liked him," thought she, "she would be more cautious. Were she to blame, her language would be less irritable. Since she resents, she is irreproachable!"

As the old lady made this inference, the door of the drawing room suddenly opened, and Monsieur de Choisy was announced!

CHAPTER VI.

The man of fashion advanced with a gracious air, without betraying disappointment, at perceiving that a third person was to be present at the interview; while, at sight of the being, whom she regarded as a prowling wolf, the Marchioness determined upon one of those measures before which prudence recoils, but which are sometimes prompted by the exigency of the moment.

"It is a hopeless case with Monsieur de Beaupré," thought she, receiving with an ambiguous smile, the compliments of the Viscount. "He would sell his daughter for a horse, or his soul for a buck. To speak rationally to Flavie,

would be the very means to urge her to some imprudence. My son must know nothing, for with the education he has received, his intervention would be only prejudicial; it is therefore to this man I will address myself. Monsieur de Choisy!" said she, cutting short the graceful courtesies of the Viscount, "I rejoice in the opportunity of speaking to you alone. I desire your advice upon a subject which, in consideration of my provincial prejudices, I fear you will judge too severely. It would flatter me to find the opinion of a man like yourself, whose foible is not that of strict severity, in accordance with my own."

"Plague take the old woman," thought the Viscount; "does she take me for a casuist? What the devil are her confidences to *me?* Pray proceed, Madam," said he, more respectfully; "but in truth, I fear that, in consulting me, you do too much honour to my feeble judgment."

"What should you think," said the Mar-

chioness, "of a man who, after being introduced into a family upon the sacred plea of friendship, taking advantage of the confidence reposed in him, should, in return for the hospitality, he receives, be guilty of a design as treacherous as it is deliberate."

"A hit!" thought Choisy, though his countenance was not the least embarrassed. "The crime to which you allude, Madam," said he, "is one of such frequent occurrence in the world, that to presume to judge the question, one must be oneself irreproachable. Unfortunately such is not my position; and as you rightly observed just now, rigidity would ill become me. Permit me therefore to decline expressing an opinion. I have enough to do with the examination of my own conscience, without presuming to animadvert on the errors of others."

"I did not require any examination of your conscience," said Madame de Gardagne, with perfect imperturbability. "On the contrary,

I will at once admit the man to whom I allude, to be yourself. Do not deny it. Suffice it that you have already warranted my doubts of your delicacy of feeling. I will deal frankly with you. For these last six months, you have been paying attentions to Madame de Luscourt—"

"Can you believe, Madam, that——"

"Excuse me, Sir, I am an old fashioned woman, unacquainted with the intrigues of society; you, a man of acknowledged skill and experience. The advantage is therefore on your side, but do not presume too much upon your superiority. On certain points, women never grow old, and seldom fail in their judgment. I repeat to you, your conduct for six months has been most reprehensible. Dare you deny it?"

To this close inquiry, to which a fixed and penetrating eye imparted an imposing authority, the Viscount felt that all denegation would be superfluous. His vanity

rebelled against playing the school boy who descends to a lie to escape the cane of the usher.

" Since you exact the avowal, Madam," said he, " however strange it may appear, I own that I much admire Madame de Luscourt."

" Your declaration will never reach her through *me*," said the old lady, " spare yourself therefore the trouble of deceit. You cannot swear, your hand upon your heart, that you truly love Madame de Luscourt?"

" How Madam! do you doubt the sincerity of my admiration for her?"

" To save time, I will admit your sentiments to be genuine. Forget for a moment that I am her mother-in-law and let us discuss the question, as if not individually concerned in it. I can understand such a sentiment to exist in extreme youth; but at your age, Monsieur de Choisy, with your usage of the world and acute turn of mind, how am I to believe you the dupe of such self-delusion? No! you

do not love her, I maintain it; it is your vanity and not your heart that speaks. If report speak only half the truth, you are somewhat weary of your Parisian triumphs; Madame de Luscourt, fresh and beautiful, and new, presents a fit interlude to vary the monotony of your ordinary triumphs and diversions."

"Alas! Madam!" said the middle-aged swain, "in how odious a point of view do you regard my conduct!"

"Odious, indeed!" exclaimed Madame de Gardagne; "and my great ambition is to make you share in my opinion. You perceive that I have anticipated your designs; I need scarcely explain my own. You will find in me a vigilant, untiring adversary. It is not in the cause of virtue that I take up the defence of outraged morality; but as a mother defending the character of her child — which is more precious than her life. The question stands clear before us. I look upon you as an

enemy. I shall be upon my guard. Be frank in your turn, and tell me what are your hopes?"

"I respect Madame de Luscourt too much to have even dared to hope," replied the Viscount, less unconstrained.

"An honest sentiment, for which I give you credit!" said the mother of Maxime. "You admit such hopes to be an outrage? To what then do you pretend! I cannot much fancy you to be a man capable of the disinterested gallantry of a knight errant."

Instead of answering, Monsieur de Choisy smiled with an affectation that scarcely concealed his embarrassment.

"How bad must be your cause!" resumed Madame de Gardagne, drawing the slip knot of her argument tighter and tighter. "You cannot utter a word that does not turn against yourself! Still, I appreciate your respect for my daughter-in-law. I would never have pardoned your bad opinion of her. Madame

de Luscourt is full of feeling and honour, with judgment beyond her age; and her strong good sense replaces the maturer experience of age. I have full confidence in her. Do not, therefore, attribute to a mistrust at which she would be justly indignant, a step entirely arising from my sense of propriety. The opinions of the world are so rash, that one cannot be too cautious in averting them. 'The wife of Cæsar must not be suspected.'"

"Now for some choice examples from ancient history!" thought the Viscount. "What chance have I against this virtuous matron, who has the courage to compare her asinine son with imperial Cæsar!"

The Marchioness paused, as if to give her listener time to reply. But as Choisy remained silent, she resumed in a more gracious tone:

"My sermon is long, is it not? I see you are weary of my moralities. I feel myself to be the person you detest most in the world, and would not leave such impressions on your

mind. Though old, I am coquettish, and hold that your hatred be not too deep. Perhaps, Monsieur de Choisy, we may still be friends. Though I doubted the reality of your passion, I never doubted that of your honour. One word from *you* would end this painful subject. Come, come! Set my mind at ease. Are there not pretty women enough in Paris, who would be proud of the attentions which you now fruitlessly lavish upon another? See what egotistical, worldly arguments you compel me to use! But Heaven will pardon the sin, in consideration of the motive. Shew me then, that in believing you accessible to nobler feelings, I am not mistaken. The esteem of an old woman is but a poor reward for the generous conduct I expect from you. But you have admitted that you are hopeless; why, therefore, prefer the humiliation of disappointment, to the merit of self-denial?"

During this peroration, cheerfully pronounced by the Marchioness, Choisy had been

occupied in twisting one of the buttons of his waistcoat.

"It is written that old women will ever be fatal to the victorious!" thought he, with suppressed rage. Every syllable of the sexagenarian Marchioness had fallen upon him vertically, like the tile which ended the days of Pyrrhus.

"I am beaten out of the field, and an honourable retreat is my only resource, Madam," said he; "your appeal to my honour shall not be made in vain. You judged severely in attributing my conduct to cold calculation, and not to the ardour of passion. But as my transgression is not the less heinous, I do not attempt to justify myself. To confess my fault, is to tell you that I am ready to atone it. Speak, Madam! What do you require of me? I am prepared to obey."

"Monsieur de Choisy," replied the Marchioness, "you speak like a man of honour! I am happy to find I judged you rightly."

"What do you exact of me?" inquired the Viscount, affecting to conceal, under a smile of resignation, his bitter disappointment. "Do you banish me from the country? Am I to fly to Germany, England, or Italy? If you choose, I will fall ill, as a pretext for boring myself to death at Hyeres!"

"I do not doubt your talent for dissimulation," replied Madame de Gardagne, laughing; "but to say the truth, you do not look like a man in a decline. Besides, I do not wish to interfere with your plans and projects. Your word of honour is sufficient. I exact nothing, not even that you diminish the number of your visits. So sudden a change in your relations with us, might be remarked. There is a prudence of conduct, a discretion of deportment, which you may easily adopt, without any particular suggestion of mine. Be sure, my dear Monsieur de Choisy, that which appears so difficult now to accomplish, will one day be a source of pure and unmixed satisfaction to you,

and you will learn to thank me. In the mean while, I must forgive a little resentment. I cannot expect your reformation to be immediate."

The middle-aged dandy rose to take leave.

"Madam," said he, with an air of profound respect, "if ever I marry, it is to your suggestions I will refer myself for a wife."

"You think me lucky, then, in my selections?" said the Marchioness, with a malicious smile.

"Spare me your reproof!" cried Choisy, reddening.

"I am to blame," she replied. "You conduct yourself so well, that I ought to respect your feelings. Pardon my being in high spirits, for it is to you I owe them; and let us part friends."

Monsieur de Choisy advanced to accept the proffered hand, and pressed it to his lips with a respectful energy to which the Dowager was far from insensible.

"Adieu!" said she. "Depart in peace, and sin no more."

Again bowing with the grace peculiar to the men of the old court, the Viscount left the room. As he opened the door, he perceived Madame de Luscourt standing in the dining-room, apparently just arrived. The undulation of her gown seemed to indicate that she had suddenly halted. Choisy instantly closed the door, and advanced towards the Countess, whose cheeks were of a vermillion dye; then, eagerly seizing her hand, he placed in it a letter which he drew from his pocket. Choisy was not partial to the epistolary system, so dear to novices in love. But he knew that after one step on the road, it was difficult to pause; love-letters succeeding better by their quantity than their quality.

Madame de Luscourt was for a moment startled, and her cheeks assumed a still deeper hue. Without uttering a word, but with a movement expressive of vexation and resent-

ment, she dashed the note upon the floor. The Viscount did not attempt to pick it up, the sudden entrance of a servant compelling him to retire; but turning towards the door, and with the most admirable self-possession, he disappeared, not without having remarked the Countess conceal the note by placing her foot upon it.

After the disappearance of the middle-aged Lothario, Flavie, dismissing the servant, picked up the note, and entered the drawing-room.

"What is the matter?" inquired Madame de Gardagne. "Your dazzling colour and sparkling eyes speak wonders!"

"I am come to confess a fault which you will, I trust, pardon," replied the young wife, in a tremulous voice. "I was *there!*" said she, pointing to the door. "I heard all that passed between you and Monsieur de Choisy."

The Marchioness listened to this communication without the slightest embarrassment.

"You heard that which was little likely to please you," she replied.

"I heard only that I possessed the best and most indulgent of mothers!" replied Flavie, giving way to her emotion.

"Enough—enough, my dear child," interrupted the kind mother-in-law, in the most affectionate tone. "Thank God, we have neither of us forgotten our duty, and I trust that Choisy will fulfil his, for I believe him to be sincere."

"Here is a proof of his sincerity!" said Flavie, with a tremulous voice, offering the treacherous note to her mother-in-law.

The Marchoiness started from her seat; her countenance suddenly assuming an expression of anger and indignation.

"So then, he was deceiving me!" said she, eagerly. "Some good angel must have

prompted him to such conduct, for now you cannot do otherwise than despise him!"

"I hate him!" replied the Countess, more and more excited. "I may have been thoughtless, unguarded, coquettish, perhaps; but never did I give him the right to outrage me thus. His mode of forcing me to receive this letter was in itself an act of violence. It is the first he has addressed me, and you see that I have not read it."

"It is the second!" gravely replied the Marchioness, producing the former one; "and I must confess that I have been less discreet than yourself."

On finding her mother so well acquainted with their proceedings, Flavie raised her eyes to heaven, as if in gratitude for its protection. Madame de Gardagne took the two epistles as if she were about to cast them into the fire.

"If you burn them, will he not think that

I have read them, and that I keep them ?" said the young wife, retaining her arm.

" Right, my dear child," resumed the old lady. " But you cannot return them yourself. Be it my business,"

Madame de Gardagne immediately put the letters into her pocket, then bidding her daughter-in-law sit beside her, took her hands in hers, and in terms of endearing affection, offered the most parental advice. She spoke with all the eloquence habitual to women, when expatiating upon the sentiments of the heart, and in requital for her maternal tenderness, received an answer as unexpected as it was rational.

" Dear mother, let us set out for Luscourt. Paris has no charms for me. Here life appears to teem with perfidious allurements. I require tranquillity and solitude. I long to escape from this dangerous vortex, in which my head reels. I long to be with you, my father, and

Maxime, who alone truly love me. Let us go, I implore you."

"Yes, dear Flavie, we will go, since you require it," answered Madame de Gardagne, too happy in receiving a proposition which at the moment was hovering on her own lips. Her plans had succeeded beyond her hopes.

CHAPTER VII.

On that day, contrary to his usual habits, Maxime de Luscourt was late for dinner. At length, he made his appearance, half famished, but full of spiritual nourishment from a sermon preached by the Abbé Lacordaire. According to the custom of bigoted people, enamoured of their own impressions, the enthusiast imagined nothing better than to make the family share in the lesson with which he had been so edified. Hardly had he unfolded his napkin, when he commenced an attack upon the philosophical doctrines of the school of the eighteenth century,

and as the sermon was under three heads, and the dinner had but three courses, the dessert came in before Maxime had finished the annihilation of Voltaire and Rousseau—those two eternal targets of ecclesiastical riflemen!

Monsieur de Beaupré listened to his son-in-law's homily with the praiseworthy resignation of a man who is enjoying a good dinner. Flavie was, to all appearance, strictly attentive; but for the first time, Madame de Gardagne bent upon her son an eye less kindly than scrutinizing. Impressed by the worldly ideas which had invaded the habitual austerity of her mind in the course of the last two days, the film fell from eyes long sealed by the duties of religion and maternity. In spite of her affection, she could not but remark that Maxime, with his long black coat and long fair hair, had a scholastic appearance, fitter for an ecclesiastic than for a man of the world; and all the more flagrant as the supreme elegance of Monsieur de Choisy challenged a

ridiculous comparison. In spite of her own profound piety, she could not help perceiving that her son, though an admirable theologian, was deficient in the tone and manners of polished society.

"Will he never have done with Voltaire?" murmured she, unable to resist her ill humour. "Nobody here presumes to contradict him. He should be more attentive to Flavie, whom he is worrying to death. My son is quite insupportable. His voice, naturally so agreeable, becomes harsh when excited, and his gesticulations are devoid of all ease or grace. People are right to say that mothers are blind. Till now, I never was aware of Maxime's failings. He possesses both head and heart, with great rectitude of character. His religious principles, thank Heaven, are unassailable; and he is every thing that is noble or honourable. But after all, appearance—appearance is something! nay, of paramount consequence in the eyes of frivolous

people, and of what are we women made but frivolity ? If, to enhance his excellent qualities, Maxime possessed only a quarter of Monsieur de Choisy's worldly advantages, which he turns to such ill account, he would be a finished gentleman, and Flavie would adore him !"

Maxime was now once more giving vent, in the dryest prose, to his peculiar opinions; when Madame de Gardagne abruptly rose, and terminated the tedious homily of her son. She passed the evening and part of the night in meditating in her own apartment on the fallacies of a system to which she had been wedded for the last twenty years, and which, to all appearance, had acquired a permanent footing in the family. A mind naturally benevolent, at length, penetrated the mists of intolerance; and the Marchioness perceived that if virtue be at all times indispensable, it is in some instances insufficient; and that the education of Maxime, exclusively

devoted to the practice of virtue, was unfitted to the corruptions of civilized life. Piety and simplicity of mind, so excellent in solitude, become, in the world, a source of endless peril. The just man is sure to fall a sacrifice if he present his bare throat to the knife of the assassin. In their struggle with the evil spirits, the angels, if we are to believe Raphael and Milton, assumed in imitation of their adversaries, the spear and the sword; and Piety, from the moment she descends to the terrestrial arena, must secure herself in the panoply of worldly wisdom, or sink in the strife.

The Marchioness did not flinch from the results of her new views and projects.

"I have been to blame," said she, "in listening to my personal feelings. I have conducted myself like one who sends her son into a forest full of thieves, forbidding him the use of arms, for fear of wounding himself. Paris is fatal to matrimonial happiness, and my poor

Maxime as I have brought him up, defenceless against the specious traitors who surround us. His purity of mind, if it secure salvation in the world to come, secures perdition in this; and I would fain have him reach the heavenly goal by a less thorny road than I have followed. My boy must live, as well as die, happy; and happiness is impossible for him without the love of Flavie. It is not too late to acquire it. He must become like other men of his age and condition—amiable, elegant, attractive. Conscious of the mischief engendered by my own austerity, I will pray night and day—I will do even penance for him, and Heaven will pardon the failings of a mother who has loved much!"

Next day, Madame de Gardagne sent for Maxime.

"Yesterday," said she, "your wife decided that instead of going to Madame de Selve's, we would immediately return home. Flavie is fatigued with her balls, and I find that a

Paris life does not suit me ; so we shall go without delay—perhaps to-morrow."

"I would rather it were to-day," said Maxime, greatly pleased ; "I long to be at Luscourt, and return to a life of tranquillity and simplicity. The vortex of Parisian life is contrary to my tastes and habits, and every day I grow more impatient to quit them."

"You must, nevertheless, submit to it a few days longer," said his mother-in-law.

"How, do I not accompany you ?"

"You forget your law-suit !"

"It will not go before the court of appeal these two months."

"True ! but you must visit the judges, consult your counsel, in fact, attend to all the circumstances arising out of the progress of the suit. Business before every thing, Maxime. Remember, you are now a man, and responsible for the management of your fortune. Whether it please you or no, you must remain here till the decision of the court of appeal."

"As you please," replied the obedient son. "But it is a cruel sacrifice! What am I to do when you are both gone?"

"Have you not a thousand ways of employing your time?"

"Certainly. In the first place, study; and I promise you that the Royal Library will oftener receive my visits than the drawing-rooms of our fashionable friends."

"Study!" exclaimed Madame de Gardagne, pettishly. "Listen, dear Maxime. It is possible to study too much. You may, perhaps, think me frivolous for my time of life, and influenced by the brilliant society in which we have been living this winter. Nevertheless, permit me to suggest a plan of life somewhat at variance with yours, to which you would do well to apply yourself during our separation."

"I am all attention, dear mother," replied Luscourt, smiling. "Are you not my guide, my oracle? To what am I to apply myself? Hebrew or Sanscrit?"

"On the contrary, to every thing that is most French in the world. Certain branches of your education have been hitherto neglected, and to which you would do well to give your attention. Riding, for instance—music, dancing, fencing—"

"Fencing!—dancing!" exclaimed Maxime, in utter amazement.

"I need scarcely tell you that it is not with a view to fighting or going to balls. But all these exercises, innocent enough in themselves, are conducive to health. They fortify the body, and promote an ease and grace of person far from despicable."

"I fear you think me very awkward!" observed Maxime, inwardly mortified.

"Between an awkward deportment and finished manners, there are many degrees, my child," she replied. "Pardon my maternal pride, if I desire to see your personal advantages in their best light."

"That others judge me awkward, dear mother, is a matter of perfect indifference," replied

the young Count; "but your slightest wishes must ever be my law. In order, then, to please you, I shall take the lessons you suggest."

"As regards your dress," said the mother, delighted to have gained the first point, "I cannot imagine who you employ for a tailor! One would think you were dressed in the cast off clothes of Monsieur de Beaupré!"

"Dearest mother, I never knew you so anxious about my exterior before. Since when have you taken to heart the cut of my coat?" cried Maxime, with a glance at his costume, in which comfort more than elegance seemed to have been studied.

"Of whom ought I to be vain, if not of my son?" cried the Marchioness.

"I do not aspire to become a coxcomb," said the young husband, indignantly.

"There is a wide difference between being a coxcomb, and the acquirement of certain

qualities, superficial, if you will, but essential to your position of life. Your principles are too firm to be influenced by the frivolous examples of society. After all, one may be virtuous, yet elegant; a model of propriety, and yet fashionably dressed. In former times, when a young man appeared in the world, he selected some one of acknowledged taste and elegance for his model, and thus acquired the brilliant and graceful exterior exacted by society. Why should you not follow the example? Among the men of your acquaintance there are three or four competent to give you valuable advice on the subject; Monsieur de Choisy, for instance. I do not allude to his manners or his reputation, which I appreciate much less than his taste."

"Believe me, Choisy is calumniated," said the Count, gravely. "I have ever found in him the strictest probity and delicacy. He knows my principles, and though we differ on many points, he strictly respects them. On

Friday, for instance, I dined with him. There was not, a single dish of meat on the table!—a trifle I allow; but coming from a man not over scrupulous in religious matters, it was a mark of deference to which I am sensible."

At this panegyric of the vulture from the throat of the dove, the Marchioness felt not a little inclined to unseal the eyes of her son. Prudence however forbad.

"It is precisely that good taste of his, that knowledge of life," said she, "which I would fain see you acquire. The acquaintance of Monsieur de Choisy may, in that sense, be useful. I could wish you to frequent men of your own age, more than has been your habit. Such intercourse would modify a certain rigidity of deportment not altogether advantageous to you. I hope to be agreeably surprised on your return to Luscourt; and be assured that Flavie will be no less pleased with the metamorphosis than myself."

"I conclude from all this, that you both

pronounce me deficient in personal attraction!" said Maxime, not a little piqued. "But as I have at heart only to please you, I will strive to correct myself; after all, the acquiring of qualities to which so many young men owe their success in the world, ought not to be more difficult than greek or algebra."

With joy did the Marchioness observe the tone of pique in which this was spoken. "He is touched to the quick," thought she, "and already asks nothing better to try the strength of his own wings."

Her only fear was that the fledgling, whom she was thus banishing from the nest, might be induced to push his flight too far into the new regions before him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Next morning, Madame de Gardagne and her daughter-in-law, accompanied by Monsieur de Beaupré quitted Paris; for the Marchioness was prompt in decision, and in this instance deemed it prudent to take speedy advantage of the laudable determination of her daughter-in-law. Maxime lost no time in presenting himself at Monsieur de Choisy's.

"You see me a widower, and an orphan," said he, more at his ease than usual, for the advice of his mother had already extended the horizon of his notions. On learning the departure of the ladies, the Viscount could scarcely conceal his surprise.

"Tartuffe in petticoats!" thought he; "is it thus you execute your treaties; your homily of yesterday then was a mere decoy? Luckily I am too old a fox to be caught! Stratagem against stratagem! Flavie dare not resist the will of her duenna; but at least she carries away a talisman that forbids her to forget me. Under any other circumstances, to write would have been a fault worthy a school boy; but our separation considered, my two letters may become exceedingly useful. In absence, words are forgotten, but letters are read. She has concealed mine, I am convinced, next her heart —the usual repository of clandestine correspondence."

"Here are some documents relative to the woods of La Chesnaie which my mother desired me to deliver to you," interrupted the young Count, taking from his pocket a packet carefully sealed with the huge family arms of the house of Luscourt.

The Viscount tore open the envelope; and

in the midst of the papers, perceived a small packet on which was inscribed, " Two letters read by Madame de Gardagne alone, and sent back to the Viscount de Choisy, who will comprehend the absurdity of a correspondance which only serves to divert the dull hours of a dowager."

The middle aged swain read the superscription twice, before he could venture to trust his eyes.

" Allow me to place these papers in my bureau," said he to Maxime, trying to look unconcerned and proceeding to his own room; where, in a state of phrensy, he tore asunder the seal of the vexatious envelope, in which he found the two letters he had addressed to Madame de Luscourt. In the midst of his confusion, his eyes turned involuntarily towards a glass, where his face expressed such lamentable consternation, that, after a moment's contemplation, he relaxed into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"Delicious, upon my soul!" said he. "I write letters for the benefit of the mother-in-law, and the husband returns them to me, without his having the most remote idea of the nature of his errand. That old woman is a lynx; but how did my letters fall into her hands? If my provincial beauty made them over to her, I did not think her capable of such simplicity—for it is either that or profound duplicity. To expose a confidential communication, is as sacrilegious as to betray the secret of the confessional; and I, who made so favourable an inference from seeing her place her foot upon the note! Well, well, Easter is at hand; and I have always remarked that Lent is fatal to my hopes. To have been repulsed, unmasked and distanced by an old woman! No matter! I am not used to lower my colours, and have gained battles as desperate as this."

Choisy having now recovered his usual assurance, returned to the drawing room.

After some minutes' conversation Maxime communicated to him his intention of remaining in Paris two months longer; which information readily suggested a project of retaliation.

"This old mother-in-law is my evil genius," thought he, after the departure of Luscourt. "She sees and divines all, as though she possessed the gift of the fairy Fine-ear, who the plants growing. As long as Flavie remains under her protection, my efforts will avail me nothing; but the little woman is ripe for revolt, and if I can make a tool of Luscourt, may still reconquer my influence. I must modify his principles, and his conduct will modify itself. Two or three months' absence from the mother's eye, will suffice to give him a taste for the delights of liberty. We shall manage to get rid of the dowager; and Flavie who enjoys Paris, will want to return here, when the mother-in-law will have retired to her château, like other deposed sovereigns. From that moment, my star, now in

eclipse, will shine forth again. My first object must be to influence the conduct and character of Luscourt."

Having thus digested his plans, the Viscount proceeded next day to visit Maxime.

" My dear fellow," said he, " I have a plan to propose to you. Now that the ladies are gone, why continue this expensive apartment, where you must needs be dull, for nothing is more dispiriting than a place abandoned by those we love. Come and pitch your tent with me. Far from inconveniencing me, I shall be delighted with your coming; by that means, you will avoid solitude, which must be insupportable to a man usually domesticated with his family. You will meet at my house, Marcenay, Villaret, and a few other good fellows; a rather worldly company, you will say, but your conscience has nothing to fear, for you will be perfectly at home in my house, and your habits shall be scrupulously respected. What say you?"

" One would think him acting at my mother's instigation," thought Maxime. " I should not be astonished if the thing had been preconcerted."

He consented to the treacherous proposition of his friend, in whose house he established himself that very evening. It is usual for the wolf to seek the fold ; but on this occasion the lamb accepted the hospitality of the wolf. By a singular coincidence, the Dowager and the Viscount, two implacable enemies, had chosen the same road, though the object of one was directly opposed to that of the other ; and Maxime gladly obeyed this double impulsion. His wounded self-love suggested that, since even his mother accused him of deficiency of manner and address, he must be indeed in fault ; and deeply was he mortified at the idea that his wife was not less alive to his defects.

" I admit that I dress ill," said he, after comparing himself with the elegant friends of the Viscount ; and next day, at breakfast,

he begged Choisy to give him the address of his tailor.

" I will take you myself to Blin," replied the man of fashion unable to refrain from a smile. " The first step has succeeded," thought he.

" Since you are so good, would you be also kind enough to recommend me to a good riding school ?" resumed Maxime.

" With all my heart," cried Choisy.

" Is Grisier still the best fencing master in Paris ?" inquired Maxime ; while the Viscount found it difficult to conceal his amazement.

The emancipation from which he anticipated such auspicious results, was already half effected. Maxime soon discovered a charm in the improvement produced by his change of dress. He gradually learned to estimate those personal advantages which his rigidity of principle had till now, treated with contempt. He still went regularly to mass, and observed

the fasts of the church; but his predilection for pious meditations and theological discussions gradually subsided. One evening, Maxime found himself at the Opera, almost without knowing to what evil inspiration to attribute such a secession from his principles.

"What strikes you most at the Opera?" inquired the Viscount.

"Precisely what surprised the famous doge of Venice—to find myself there at all," replied he.

But it is needless to trace, step by step, the progress of the proselyte. After passing three months, with the Viscount, with whom he lived upon the most familiar and confidential terms the Court of Appeal pronounced a favourable decision on his suit; but so little did he think of taking his departure, that he invented new pretexts to prolong his stay in Paris. One day Madame de Gardagne received a letter from her son, which produced a smile on her countenance.

"Perfumed paper, I protest!" exclaimed she; "the prodigal son could not have made more progress in the same space of time." And that very evening, she despatched an answer, enjoining Maxime to return to the château, where family affairs required his presence.

CHAPTER IX.

EARLY in the month of July, a travelling-carriage entered the court-yard of the Chateau de Luscourt. On perceiving Monsieur de Choisy step out of the carriage, the two ladies were mute with astonishment; nor did they recover their surprise on beholding a second individual appear, in the person of Maxime, so utterly metamorphosed, as to be scarcely recognizable.

A well-cut coat displayed his elegant figure to the utmost advantage; the tie of his black cravat was unimpeachable, his hair becomingly arranged, while his well-trimmed moustachios relieved the expression of his physiognomy.

His eyes, formerly so dull, now flashed like those of the eagle prepared to brave the ardour of the sun. After respectfully embracing his mother, he pressed his wife so tenderly to his bosom, that Madame de Luscourt stood blushing and confused at his change of deportment. Madame de Gardagne seemed to forget the presence of the Viscount. She beheld nothing but her son, whom she contemplated from head to foot, in a state of ecstasy bordering upon terror. At length, the vanity of the mother prevailed over her scruples.

"Scapegrace!" said she, playfully, "what excuse do you make for your long absence?"

"Dear mother," replied he, "did you not exile me? I waited only your summons."

"Somewhat patiently, I suspect," said she, accepting his arm to return to the château.

"Are you going to scold me for having obeyed you so well?" replied Maxime.

"But if you have exceeded my instructions—"

"In that case, you must be indulgent. Excess of obedience can scarcely be considered a crime."

During the rest of the day, he evinced a freedom of mind and ease of manner, exciting the wonder of his family, to whom he gave the news of Paris, talking politics, literature, and fashion, with the assurance of an old stager. His mother, as she listened, became somewhat thoughtful, probably from recollecting the expiatory offices imposed upon her by the sudden expansion of her son's worldly ideas. But Flavie watched every movement, and listened to every word from her husband's lips, with gratified attention; and Monsieur de Beaupré laughed outright at his son-in-law's newly acquired elegance of deportment. The Viscount, meanwhile, sat surveying the family groups as so many puppets destined to be pulled by his wires. After dinner, a shower of rain having confined them to the house, Beaupré, to whom quiet was insupportable, proposed a game of billiards to the Viscount.

"Let us play a pool," said he, "and then Maxime can join us."

And to the surprise of all present, the young Count not only accepted the proposal, but beat them in every game.

"My dear Maxime!" exclaimed Beaupré, "I see you have not lost your time in Paris! If you only handle a foil as well as you do a cue, my congratulations will be unlimited."

"Let us try," said Luscourt, coolly; and they proceeded to the hall, and took up the foils, masks, and gloves. This time, the young Count was defeated by the old gentleman, who, in spite of his obesity, would have made a formidable opponent to St. George. On taking off his mask at the end of the assault, he frankly accosted his adversary.

"Well done!" cried he. "In three months' lessons, you have done wonders. Your thrusts and parries want vigour; but we will soon improve them. I congratulate you with all my

heart; and trust that, with your other exercises, you have not omitted riding. You used to look like a pair of tongs when mounted."

"To-morrow I trust you will find me improved," said Maxime, with modesty.

"Your husband is grown perfectly charming," cried Monsieur de Beaupré to Flavie, who was contemplating with delight the improvement in Maxime's appearance.

From the moment of his arrival, Monsieur de Choisy conducted himself towards the Countess and the Marchioness with the supreme self-sufficiency of a man of the world. But in the course of the evening, he judged it better to renounce his diplomatic reserve; and in seeking the eyes of Flavie, resumed the expressive looks in which he had presumed to indulge three months before. The young wife, however, pertinaciously evaded his gaze; and from these manœuvres, there resulted a mute and significant scene, which Maxime could not

but perceive, though he affected ignorance of what was passing. On a renewal of the same attempts the following day, the Count requested an interview of his wily friend.

"My dear Choisy," said he, "for these three months past, I have so far profited by the lessons you have kindly given me, that I know not how to thank you. My gratitude overpowers me."

"You are laughing at me, Luscourt!" rejoined the Viscount. "For what on earth are you indebted to me?"

"For much, of which at present you are not aware," replied Maxime. "Among other things, for more quick-sightedness than of old."

"I was not aware of my talents as an oculist," said the Viscount, laughing.

"They are not the less remarkable," rejoined his friend; "for, thanks to your useful instructions, I saw you last night looking at my wife in the tenderest manner."

"Viper that I have fostered in my bosom!" thought Choisy, confounded by the result of his instructions. "You are indeed an apt scholar."

"Under these circumstances, my dear Viscount," continued Luscourt, with perfect coolness, "I confess myself to be under the greatest obligation to you; but I warn you, that the acquittal of my debt, which you seem inclined to propose, does not suit me. My wife made me certain communications yesterday, unnecessary to repeat. I would fain avoid quarrels; to secure which, I will thank you to point the artillery of your seductions in some other direction."

Detected and put to shame, like the fox in the fable, the Viscount attempted an awkward explanation. Monsieur de Luscourt appeared satisfied, and the conversation dropped. On leaving the son, however, he fell in with the mother, who had just had a conversation with her daughter-in-law,

which seemed to render her twenty years younger.

"Monsieur de Choisy," said the Marchioness, "I have a few commissions for Paris. Will you be good enough to take charge of them?"

And the discomfited roué could scarcely suppress his indignation at this bold hint that his company was unacceptable.

"Are your commissions urgent?" said he, affecting to misunderstand her meaning.

"I own I am in a hurry. By exercising your utmost diligence, you will increase the vast debt of gratitude I already owe you."

"Gratitude, Madam?" exclaimed poor Choisy.

"Gratitude the most profound," replied Madame de Gardagne, with a sarcastic smile. "You intended, I am told, to perfect the education of Madame de Luscourt. The project was slight; the accomplishment might have been important to the happiness of my

family. How can I sufficiently thank you, therefore, for having transferred your educational plans to my son? Admit that he has profited by them! Monsieur de Beaupré, Madame de Luscourt, all of us, are of opinion that you have reason to be proud of your pupil."

The Viscount was too accustomed to conquest, not to accept with a good grace this single defeat.

"Your commissions shall be executed the day after to-morrow, Madam," replied he, coldly, "as I start for Paris this evening. As to your thanks, I accept them freely, for they are better deserved than you imagine."

"Explain yourself," said the Dowager, deliberately opening her snuff-box. "Pray explain yourself."

The Viscount hesitated.

"The happiness of pleasing Madame de Luscourt, Madam," said he, "is a pretension

which I have long renounced. But I could not so easily abjure the desire to secure her from pretenders more dangerous than myself. The experience your son has acquired in my society, will suggest to him the necessity of setting at defiance, by dint of his own affection and influence, the ambition of others more persevering than your humble servant."

"Se non è vero, è ben trovato!" cried the old Marchioness, with a cunning smile. "You have a charming talent, my dear Viscount, for getting out of a scrape, and pouring balm into wounds. I confess myself so far converted to your faith, that I believe knowledge of the world and superficial accomplishments essential to the husband of so pretty a woman as Madame de Luscourt. He could scarcely have found a more accomplished preceptor than yourself. Admit, in your turn," she continued, pointing through the window to the

shrubberies, through which the young couple were strolling, arm in arm, in the enjoyment of the utmost conjugal confidence—"admit, my dear Monsieur de Choisy, that you have also had—AN APT SCHOLAR."

THE STIGMA.

THE STIGMA.

CHAPTER I.

One cold and cloudy night of March, sudden gusts of wind were raising thick clouds of dust along the high road, and the usual stillness of rural life prevailed at the close of day. The herds having returned to their folds, not a voice was heard; not even that of the vigilant dogs entrusted with the security of the farms. The white walls of the cottages appeared here and there, their uncertain line forming a broad and unequal street.

The most prominent of these dwellings was at the entrance of the village, a house newly

stuccoed and the roof being embellished with a creaking weather-cock. Over the door, was suspended a sign, the humble effort of some self-taught rural genius, representing a half naked woman, wearing a pointed cap and bells, and holding in her scarlet hands, a gaudy bauble. The simple-minded peasants persisted in tracing in this grotesque performance, a symbol of Republicanism; but better enlightened individuals at once appreciated the prancing goddess, over whose head the artist had inscribed in broad yellow letters, " The Charming Folly. Good entertainment for man and horse." The sign was not very attractive; for nine times in ten, the hostess and her servant were found standing at the door, with their arms folded, surveying the waggoners, whose ponderous loads were ever rolling along the road from Strasbourg to Paris.

On the dark and tempestuous night in question, the hostess of the Folly maintained her usual station longer than usual, in the hope

that some benighted traveller would seek the hospitality of her house. A brisk fire of faggots was flaming on the hearth, and threw its light across the road ; the table was laid, chairs ranged around the table, while the bright flaggons stood in array upon a cloth of spotless whiteness.

" Not a soul !" murmured the hostess, eyeing with a feeling of ill humour, the symbol that carelessly swung over her head. " This wretched house does not so much as bring me in a farthing ! There is an end of all business ! The fast coaches have proved our ruin. It is really worth while to dress oneself daily, from, head to foot, and pay ten crowns for the most beautiful sign on the Strasbourg road, yet never see a soul within the doors ! I shall soon stick up, ' Entertainment gratis for man and horse.' Perhaps it might bring me customers. In the mean time, not a soul comes, and we have laid the cloth for nothing this evening !"

" The same as every other evening !" said the little waiting maid with a heavy sigh.

" Hold your tongue, saucy child," said the hostess, sourly; " what are you doing there with your arms crossed? Is it to look at the moon that I pay your board and wages? Go in and shut the door."

" Nay, nay, dear Madame Babillon, not yet. I see something yonder," faltered the girl, pointing out a light in the distance.

" It is the Nancy diligence."

" No, no; the diligences have only one lamp, and this has two."

" Then it must be a travelling carriage. No use to me. Such fine people don't frequent my house. There is another nice invention, posting! —the ruin of horses and inns, to say nothing of the still newer invention, where they travel without horses or post boys," said the hostess, with a sneer; " but it is not in our beautiful Lorraine, I trust, we shall ever see such nonsense!"

" Madam, Madam," interrupted the girl, " the carriage yonder is coming down upon us like the wind."

The two luminous points were indeed rapidly advancing and the smacking of the post boy's whip was distinctly heard, urging the horses to a gallop.

" It is not travellers in such a hurry, that do any good to inns, and be hanged to them!" cried the hostess. But as she pronounced the words, the sound of a heavy mass falling to the ground was heard, the lights suddenly disappeared, and cries were audible in the distance.

" The carriage is upset, a customer at last!" exclaimed the hostess, in a transport of joy. " Martine, fetch the lantern, throw some wood on the fire—tie up the dog—light the lamp—come—quick—stir yourself. The carriage is fallen into the ditch and must be broken to pieces. If they should only prove English people ; or if by chance there were some broken limbs, what a God-send for us all! Quick, Martine, let us go help these poor unfortunate people!"

The carriage was indeed upset, close to the public house of the Folly, in a deep ditch lined with brambles; and the rapacious heart of the hostess thrilled with delight, when, by the light of her lantern, she discovered the importance of the disaster. The carriage was completely destroyed. The horses struggling in their harness, lashed out tremendous kicks; while the postillion stood uttering the most tremendous oaths. Stifled groans proceeded from the interior of the carriage, from which the travellers had attempted in vain to extricate themselves.

The valet and maid who travelled in the rumble, were luckily ejected into a field of clover, and escaped with trifling contusions; but the hostess, aided by the postillion, was trying to open the door of the carriage, when a young man rushed forward, exclaiming:

"Dearest mother, are you hurt?"

"Grievously!" replied a most Britannic accent, with a degree of phlegm somewhat singular in such a situation.

"Oh, Albert! what a horrible fall!" exclaimed another voice; "take us out of this, I entreat you."

"Do not be frightened, my dear little lady," said the hostess, thrusting her robust arm into the interior of the carriage, "you are safe, I have hold of you; take my arm, and jump out."

A slight and pretty figure now sprang through the door, and fell lightly to the ground.

"Thank heaven, you are not hurt, Diana!" exclaimed the young man; "but my mother—my poor mother!"

They now extricated an old lady from the carriage, and laid her on the road-side, wrapt in her cloak.

"Take me to the nearest inn," said she, to her son as calmly as if coming out of a bath, "I feel ill, extremely ill."

"My dear aunt, how dreadful!" exclaimed the young lady, averting her eyes with horror; then, supporting herself on the arm of the

lady's maid, she faltered in a faint voice, "Nancy, take me away; were she to expire before us, it would be too shocking! I have never seen any one die. I am frightened to death, Nancy;—pray do not leave me!"

"My dear son," resumed the old lady, with the same presence of mind, "I think my right leg is fractured and my arm dislocated, which will prevent our continuing our journey. Where are we?"

"At P——, Madam, between Ligny and Bar-le-Duc, department of the Meuse," interposed the hostess, holding up her lantern, as if to shew the country. "My house is close by, where you will find every thing you desire."

"Call all your people here, my good woman," said the young man, "and send for a medical man."

"Martine, Martine," cried the hostess, "come this way. My house is yonder, Sir—the large white house by the road-side; we can carry the lady thither with ease, and in two

hours, shall have the doctor from Bar-le-Duc, even if I go and fetch him myself."

"From Bar-le-Duc? We are then in a village far from all assistance. Alas! my poor suffering mother!" said the young man in despair.

"If she would only die here," thought the hostess, beginning to calculate what such a catastrophe might produce; "what a stroke of luck!"

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the travellers were installed at the sign of the Folly. The suffering lady was placed in a spacious room, whose mysterious depths were scarcely discernible by the aid of two lights placed at the corners of the chimney piece. The wind whistled through the cracked and shutterless windows, raising the dust from the hearth, on which hissed a faggot of green wood. Scanty serge curtains surrounded the bed, the worm-eaten feet of which, protruded from under a deeply flounced counterpane. A rickety table

and three or four broken-backed chairs completed the furniture of the apartment, which the hostess persisted in styling the state chamber, and in which no traveller had slept for several years.

The young man, seated at the head of the bed, was absorbed in reverie. His eyes were fixed upon his suffering mother; and, with a face of ghastly paleness, he waited the arrival of the doctor. The young lady was standing before the fire, leaning against the mantle-piece, her pretty little foot resting upon the iron fender. Her features were striking and regular, her fair locks fell profusely around her face and delicate white throat. She had an exquisite complexion, a slender and elegant form and stature, and the blue limpid eye, peculiar to the Northern tribes. She evidently belonged to that island so famed for the fresh and radiant beauty of its women; but there was wanting that infantine grace, that expression of modest timidity, which usually impart

a charm to English faces. Her face announced ill humour, rather than grief or anxiety; and she cast a look of contempt upon the mean and naked room, though the best that could be placed at the disposal of travellers, by the hostess of the Folly. The lady's maid, raising her eyes to heaven, was likewise horror-struck by prospects of such unusual privation.

When the doctor arrived, Diana retired into a room close to that of her aunt, where she waited the opinion about to be given. On finding the consultation prolonged, she took up a book, and soon evinced its influence by wrapping herself in her pelisse, and indulging in a gentle yawn; then, sinking back in her chair, she closed her eyes, and her charming head resting on one of her hands, fell fast asleep.

At the close of an hour, a slight knock at the door suddenly awoke her. She was surprised and confused on seeing her cousin stand before her.

"Well?" said she, without rising.

"Thank heaven, the doctor, in whom I place much confidence, assures me that my mother is in no danger!" said the young man, with much emotion. "But what a horrible accident! The bone is crushed, and the operation was most painful. My poor mother! How cruelly she suffered, yet without uttering a word! You heard nothing, Diana?—How long the time must have appeared to you!"

As he pronounced these words, his eyes fell upon the book open on the table, and a smile of bitterness played upon his lips. He turned away his head, but the movement was unperceived by Diana.

"Does the doctor think my aunt can be removed to Bar-le-Duc?" she inquired.

"Certainly not!" replied he, coldly. "We shall be here a month or six weeks. Good night, Diana. It is late. Take some rest; *I* will watch over my mother."

And he retired, without offering his hand, as was his custom, to his lovely cousin.

"A month or six weeks here!" murmured the young lady. "But it will be enough to kill one! What will become of me in this horrible place?"

"Did you call, Madam?" said the hostess, entering at that moment. "Your room is quite ready."

"My room? You presume to call that dirty garret you showed me, with two straw chairs and a bed without curtains, a room? Am I to sleep there, pray?"

"The apartment is clean," said the astonished hostess, "and commands a pretty view of the high-road and the meadows beyond. To be sure you would have been better off in the great room; but—"

"The one is as bad as the other!" said the young lady, abruptly. "Be so good as to let me have something to eat. I suppose we are to sup? Where is the dining-room?"

"The dining-room?—You passed through it, Madam, down stairs—as you enter."

"The kitchen!—Are we among savages?" cried Miss Diana, with a degree of consternation somewhat ludicrous. "I will sup in my own room, then. You may retire."

"This young damsel does not seem very accommodating," said the hostess, grumbling as she went down stairs.

"How should she?" cried the lady's maid, who was following. "A rich and noble heiress, like Miss Diana Neville, has a right to give herself airs."

"The old lady seems rather more agreeable," observed the hostess.

"Do you allude to the Countess de Guercy?" demanded the waiting woman scornfully.

"A Countess in my house!" exclaimed the hostess, in ecstacy, "a thing that never happened before, even in the time of my grandfather!"

An hour later, the doors and windows were closed; all was still in the village inn. Some

there were, however, who did not sleep. Miss Diana, stretched, for the first time in her life, on a bed without curtains, reviled the destiny which had reduced her to an obscure inn in the heart of Lorraine, with far more sympathy than she bestowed upon the sufferings of her aunt.

The young man, meanwhile, seated at the head of his mother's bed, reflected, with a heavy heart, on his present grievances; more especially as the future presented prospects as unpromising as they were uncertain. He thought of Diana, his beautiful cousin, with whom he had only a week's acquaintance, and to whom he was shortly to be united; and as the circumstances of their recent intercourse recurred to him, his mind sorely misgave him.

The only inmate of the house whose midnight meditations were perfectly satisfactory, was the astonished hostess of the Folly.

CHAPTER II.

Next day, Albert de Guercy and Miss Diana Neville breakfasted in the chamber of the Countess. The old lady had passed a good night, supporting her sufferings with courage, resignation, and patience, sanguine of a prompt recovery. Her son, somewhat reassured, had resumed his calm and happy countenance, and the good humour of a young man accustomed to the ease and elegancies of a life spent in refined amusements and agreeable occupations. He had all the appearance of a person enjoying a good position in the world, and uninterrupted happiness. His expression of countenance was not remarkable;

but his jet black hair, elegant figure, and delicate features, imparted an air of peculiar distinction. Born of a French father, and educated in a French college, he had occasionally a slight accent of English, that one would have imagined he purposely imitated from his mother.

The Countess, on the other hand, was of the true English character—phlegmatic, resolute, original, full of noble qualities and eccentricities; yet a worthy woman, devoting herself to the happiness and prospects of her son, with more affection than discernment. She was passionately fond of travelling, and for ever furnishing residences in which she did all but reside. At the time of her recent accident, she was returning from Germany, with the only daughter of her brother, Miss Diana Neville, whose mother had recently died at Weimar, and who was to pass the spring with her in Paris. A marriage was projected between the heiress and the young Count, of which the young lady was still ignorant.

Miss Diana was neither speculative nor far-sighted. Young and handsome as she was, her selfishness might still pass for the result of a wayward temper and the caprice of a spoilt child. But Albert was beginning to suspect that his pretty cousin possessed a cold and arid heart, and an obstinate disposition. As they now sat opposite to each other, with the weary faces of two persons having little sympathy, the conversation soon flagged. Luckily the hostess, followed by Martine, entered the room, and gave a well-timed fillip to the conversation.

"As we are here for some time, my good woman," said Diana, "you really must make your house more habitable."

"What is wanting, then, in my house?" muttered the irritated hostess. "Every thing is nice and clean, bright and shining. You have only to ask for what you want."

"In the first place," said Diana, "I must have a lamp instead of those horrible candles."

"Nothing easier!" replied the hostess. "You have got one in your room."

"That horrible brass thing, which burns all night in the chimney?" cried Diana. "I tell you I want a lamp,—a lamp that burns with a white flame."

"A lamp with a white flame! what can she mean?" ejaculated the humiliated hostess.

"She means, Madam," said Martine, "a lamp like those of Madame Vialart; things as tall as a church steeple, and as full of mechanism as a barrel organ. They give out light like sun-shine."

"Perhaps Madame Vialart would be kind enough to lend me one of her lamps for a few days," mused the hostess.

"I must also have an arm-chair," said Diana.

"Mademoiselle has one already in her room."

"That old straw-bottomed ricketty concern?

No, no! I want a well-stuffed chair, in which I can repose."

"Like those at Madame Vialart's," added Martine; "arm-chairs into which one sinks like eider-down."

"Madame Vialart is so obliging, that perhaps she would lend me one. I would take care to put on a cover," said the hostess, apart.

"We must also have a clock, carpets, and foot-stools," continued Diana; "in fact, every thing indispensable to a house, and which is wanting here."

"Mercy on me!" thought the hostess, "where is all this to be found?"

The fair damsel now resumed her inventory with a haughty air; and at every object successively enumerated, Martine did not fail to say, with a certain air of pride,

"I know where to find it. Madame Vialart has plenty of such things, besides books and pictures."

"And who is Madame Vialart?" suddenly inquired Albert.

"To own the truth, Sir, I cannot say!"

"Madame Vialart is a good charitable lady," interposed Martine, "who lives at the end of the village, sir, in a pretty new house. Ask the poor people, Sir; *they* will tell you."

"Does she reside alone?" inquired Albert.

"No, Sir, she has a young lady with her."

"Is she young, then, and pretty?" demanded Miss Neville.

"Young, but for her beauty, I cannot say much," said the hostess, with the disparaging propensity peculiar to old women when ugly and crabbed. "The poor lady is not in good health, I fear. She is as white as wax. Perhaps she is in trouble; but nobody knows anything about her. It is now four years since she came here, and she has not yet received a single visit. She seems to have no relations, and at first, we had our suspicions. But as she never gets into debt, gives work to

the poor, and never beats down the shopkeepers, we now respect her. Whenever I have a service to ask, it is to her I address myself."

"She ought to be grateful for the preference," said Diana, ironically.

That evening, the poor hostess returned from Madame Vialart's, with an air of triumph.

"There!" said she, placing a beautiful lamp upon a bronze tripod; "and this is not all. We are to have carpets, arm-chairs, and stools!"

"How?" said the Count; "have you asked for all these things for us? It is being too troublesome!"

"By no means, Sir! When I mentioned that a lady lay ill at my house from an accident, she placed all at my disposal. She has such a generous heart, a heart of gold! I thanked her from the bottom of my soul."

Shortly afterwards, the furniture was

brought, which proved to be of the simplest elegance. Albert remembered having seen such in Paris ; and his surprise was the greatest on finding it accompanied by some English books of travels and poetry, and a portfolio of engravings. All these things revealed habits of luxury and elegance, characteristic of a woman whose life must have passed in circles rarely found out of the latitude of Paris.

A strong feeling of interest and curiosity soon preoccupied the mind of Count Albert. He was ardently desirous of making the acquaintance of one whose tastes and habits seemed in such direct contradiction to the seclusion in which she lived. Involuntarily, he found himself sympathising in her complete isolation ;—in that existence which rolled away, blank and monotonous as the horizon of the desert. He even founded a romance upon the life of Madame Vialart ; and made a thousand suppositions and inquiries, in which Martine could give little information.

Diana was somewhat pacified by the aspect of the furniture placed at her disposal. Having installed herself in a luxurious velvet arm-chair, close to a charming sofa-table, upon which were placed some amusing volumes, her ill humour gave way to a fit of ennui, which, upon so beautiful a face, took the aspect of melancholy. By degrees, her ennui assumed a tone of reflection. She discovered that her cousin was one of the most distinguished looking men she had ever seen. An instinct of coquetry, the desire to please, awoke within her, imparting to her beauty the only charm in which it was deficient. Albert was for a moment dazzled. Although he did not love his cousin, his mother's project of a marriage between them commanded his implicit deference.

During the first day or two, Count Albert did not quit the invalid, to whom Diana was equally assiduous in her attentions. But one morning, the weather appeared unusually mild, a beautiful April sun warmed the surface of the

earth, and the air seemed gladdened by the return of spring.

"To-day, dear Albert," said the Countess, addressing her son, "you must quit the atmosphere of this sick room."

"Where would you have me go, dearest mother?" inquired the young man, with a smile. "Diana, who walks every morning, assures me there is nothing to admire in this neighbourhood."

"It is too true!" said she. "Impossible to find a less interesting landscape. I have seen nothing fit for my sketch-book, but a pretty villa peeping out of a clump of trees."

Albert immediately recalled to mind the description of Martine.

"I will go out, as you desire it," said he "for I have a visit to make."

"A visit to make?" repeated the two ladies.

"A visit of ceremony. Ought I not go

thank the lady who so kindly lent us the furniture?"

"Certainly! I shall go myself with Diana, as soon as I am sufficiently well."

The young lady said nothing, but cast a look of vexation on her cousin, which he did not appear to understand, but, slightly bowing, left the room.

Count Albert now pursued his way along the street which, with intermingling gardens, formed the village of P——. The influence of a genial spring day gave rise to those feelings of calm happiness and vague expectation, so often conceived in hearts unacquainted with the stern realities of life. To him, the past was but a remembrance of all that is calm and blest in human life. Weariness of spirits, which, in the absence of real sorrow, often attacks an excitable mind, had never yet beset him. Travel had hitherto constituted his chief excitement; but while his imagination

had been enlivened, his heart maintained complete inaction.

The Count having halted at the end of the village, eagerly sought the spot described by Martine. The villa was easy to distinguish. It was such a house as Rousseau would have chosen; white, with green blinds, the lazy waters of the Ornain traversing the meadows which surrounded it. At some distance, it looked like a swan basking in the sun, with wings extended.

The Count proceeded along the avenue, his heart beating as if some urgent event were at hand, and not a simple act of politeness and courtesy. All was silent round the house.

The flight of a bird, or the murmur of a rippling fountain concealed among the trees, alone interrupted the stillness. It might have passed for the abode of the Sleeping Beauty, waiting for the prince who was to awaken her at the end of a hundred years.

The Count entered the hall, of which the

doors were open, when a maid presented herself, apparently startled at his appearance. Never had she yet announced a visit to her mistress; and without giving Albert time to mention his name, she opened the door, saying abruptly,

"Here is a gentleman."

Two ladies were seated beside the fire-place; one, on hearing the voice of the Count, laid down her book, and rose, slightly blushing. The other remained at her embroidery, like one whom the visit did not concern, but who was there on sufferance.

With graceful courtesy, Albert expressed his acknowledgements, which were accepted with perfect ease and good taste. Still, with this elegance of manner, there was combined a certain timidity as well as singular reserve. The interview was such as generally takes place between two people who meet for the first time; but Madame Vialart had such a happy facility of expression, as to confer a grace upon

the tritest subjects. Albert had not been ten minutes in her presence, before he decided that he had never seen a woman resembling the stranger. Though her round delicate features gave her an air somewhat infantine, it was united with the pensive look of mature age; the look announcing that all the joys of the soul are dead—all the hopes of life extinct, and that nothing remains but reminiscences of the past. She had not even the freshness of youth. Her face was unusually pale, and her jet black hair arranged in two even bands upon her marble forehead.

A rigid simplicity of costume contrasted with the refined luxury that surrounded her; and her plain black gown looked almost like mourning. Her companion was less young, but far handsomer than Madame Vialart; her physiognomy announcing an energetic and passionate nature, but devoid of delicacy and intelligence. It was regular and perfect beauty, deficient in the peculiar air of distinction

which constituted the charm of Madame Vialart. The conversation soon became more lively; and the fair stranger appeared to have found in Albert an echo of the world from which she was separated. Not an allusion escaped her, however, to that world; which seemed to be her natural sphere, and in which she was probably deeply regretted. She was suddenly startled by an inquiry from the Count, whether there were any family in the neighbourhood with whom they could establish relations of civility and intercourse.

"Not one!"—she replied, with a pensive smile, and a glance implying the absolute isolation in which she lived. Her companion, who had left her work, was listening with attention to the conversation in which she did not join; but at the last observation, which seemed to express a kind of regret, she observed, with an air of affection: "Nevertheless, our solitude has its charms. Our years roll quietly away—do they not, dearest Lucy?"

"A life so calm and quiet, elapses almost without one's being aware of it," replied Madame Vialart; and this was uttered in such a tone of resignation, that Albert was touched to the quick. An involuntary comparison presented itself to his mind. He reflected on the haughty assurance of Diana; till the fate of this poor woman, whose hopes and desires were limited to an existence all but negative, inspired him with earnest pity. He even ventured to tax the justice of heaven in conferring so brilliant a destiny on the one hand, and so scanty a portion of happiness on the other.

On taking leave, the Count begged permission to return; and upon his departure, Madame Vialart inquired of her young friend whether the visit had not been a painful interruption.

"Oh! that I could forget the existence of a world different from that in which we live!" exclaimed she; and when the young lady looked up, the eyes of her friend were overflowing with tears.

"Are you not happy, dear Lucy, that you weep?" she inquired, throwing her arms round her neck.

"It is merely a sudden depression, that will quickly pass," said Madame Vialart. "See! it is already over!—I am calm;—while you, poor soul, still weep to see me in trouble—"

"Which does me more harm than yourself," added the young lady, her large black eyes fixed upon Madame Vialart. "I would risk my life for you, if necessary."

"Dear Eleanor," said she, "so long as you are with me, I cannot be unhappy. And you will never leave me, will you? Let us content ourselves, then, with the present, and endeavour to forget the past."

Meanwhile, the Count returned home, in a disturbed state of mind. Never had he been so pre-occupied. Scarcely replying to the questions of Diana, he merely informed his mother that Madame Vialart was a woman of distinguished mind and manners.

The following day was Sunday. Early in

the morning, Albert placed himself close to the window which commanded the church of P——, standing in the midst of a churchyard, full of mallows growing over a few black wooden crosses.—Madame Vialart and her young friend soon made their appearance, proceeding to mass. The face of the fair stranger was concealed under a dark capote; but from the diminutive size of her foot, Albert recognised her at once, as well as from her light and airy figure. She passed on modestly, amid the salutations of the peasants, who, by their eagerness to approach her, announced the generosity and benevolence of her intercourse with her poorer neighbours. The observations of the young Count were unceremoniously interrupted by Martine.

"What are you doing here, Sir?" said she. "Looking out for Madame Vialart? There she goes! See how the people bow to her. It is just the same every Sunday. She is worshipped here; and it is said she is thinking of

purchasing an estate among us—all the land that lies between the forest and the river."

"A magnificent property!"—observed the Count, somewhat astonished.

"Worth I know not how many hundred thousand francs," continued Martine. "What happiness to be so rich!"

"I, too, am rich," thought Albert, "and fortune need be no obstacle between us. Perhaps, after all," thought he, rebuking the wildness of his fancies, "Monsieur Vialart may be still alive. What folly to waste two hours here, for the sake of a mere glimpse of her. In a few days, I shall be far away, and she will scarcely remember the stranger who passed through her village."

Then, hastily quitting the window, he resumed his place by the side of Diana.

A few days afterwards, Albert returned to Madame Vialart's, urged by feelings of interest for which he could not possibly account. He found her again, seated in the same room,

in company with her companion. Her occupations were unvarying. She either worked with her needle, or was engaged in reading. The Count, remarking a magnificent piano, placed between the doors opening upon the garden, inquired of Madame Vialart whether she were fond of music.

The question seemed to awake some painful reminiscence, and stir up bitter reflections; for looking mournfully towards the piano, she replied,—"I have renounced music—it gives me pain."

The Count observed that Madame Vialart received neither newspapers nor new publications. Some periodicals, of old date, were the most recent novelties in her collection. It seemed as if she did not wish to be reminded in her solitude, of the world she had abandoned.

The acquaintance, which in the beginning was only a source of amusement to Count Al-

bert, soon became indispensable to his happiness. Whether the life he led at P—— had favoured the impulses of his heart, or whether his hour were arrived, certain it was that he loved Madame Vialart, as a man loves only for the first time, with fervor, impetuosity, and anxiety. Giving way to emotions so new to him, he lived from day to day, happy in the unsuspected consciousness of his passion, without hope, without desire. At length, he reflected on the inevitable result of these delightful terms of intimacy, and on his approaching departure, became miserable. Albert was conscious of anticipating nearly with regret, the convalescence of his mother!

The health of the Countess was nearly re-established. One day, she observed with that peculiar phlegm, and the tone of authority that rendered her most trivial words impressive: "Do you not find this country very agreeable, Albert?—I would willingly pass the summer here, if you consented."

"Dear mother, I will do exactly as you please!" he replied; but though accustomed to the eccentricities of his mother, he had not anticipated such a proposal.

"I could have workmen from Bar le Duc, and make all this comfortable enough," said she. "I might superintend them myself, which would amuse me as soon as I am able to walk. The summer must be beautiful in Lorraine. Diana will amuse herself with sketches; you, with the sports of the field, and if we get tired we can only depart."

"But what will Diana say?"—urged the young Count.

"I have spoken to her on the subject, and she consents to pass some months here."

"Consents?"—

"Ay!" replied the Countess, with a smile; "she desires no better residence!—Albert, Albert! you have very little penetration!"

"What do you mean, dear mother?" cried he, as if some new idea had struck his mind.

"I mean," said the Countess, with an air of triumphant satisfaction, "that our lily of Albion, our proud and charming Diana, will stay wherever you choose, and prefer it to any other spot on earth.—She loves you, Albert!"

"Impossible, mother!" exclaimed the Count, "I have made no effort to merit such a distinction. God forbid that my cousin should love me; for know that my whole heart is given to another!"

END OF VOL. I.

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